



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

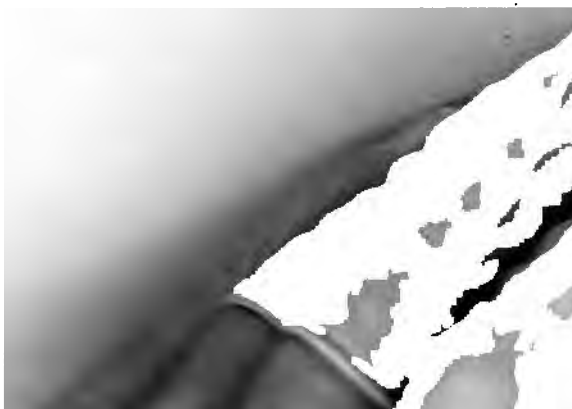
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600056842V





A DOG AND HIS SHADOW.

A DOG AND HIS SHADOW.

BY

R. E. FRANCILLON,

AUTHOR OF "OLYMPIA: A ROMANCE," "PEARL AND EMERALD,"
"EARL'S DENE," "ZELDA'S FORTUNE," ETC.

Second Edition.



London

GRANT & CO., TURNMILL STREET, E.C.

1876.

[All rights reserved.]

251. d. 291.

LONDON

GRANT AND CO., PRINTERS, TURNMILL STREET, E.C.

A DOG AND HIS SHADOW.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

Whence blows it? Never a man may know:
And whither? None may say:
Yet high and low must come and go
Along the Wind's highway.
For every blast that lists to blow,
Whither and whence it may,
Doth strip some leaflet from the bough
It gave but yesterday—
Doth waft a soul to weal or woe,
Or whirl a soul away.

“MILLY!—Oh, you dreadful child! Can't
you let one rest one's eyes a minute
from looking to see where next you're going
to? And I with all this work to do before
to-morrow! I declare I little knew what a
trial I was laying on myself when I promised

to look after you. You're brother Sam's child every inch you're high. Milly—Milly—there, if I didn't know it—head over heels into the coal-box again, and your frock clean on this morning—you're enough to tire out Job's patience, that you are—what is it you want now? No, Milly—you mustn't have the carving knife—nor yet the candles—no, nor the beer. My spectacles?—There they are then, if you must have something to keep you quiet—though how I'm to get through my work without my spectacles"—

And so, for a good hour or more, rambled the sharp voice of Mrs. Tallis the house-keeper, as she sat over her supper and her sewing in her own snug little corner of the old Manor House at Winbury. She was a stately personage of middle age and of an ancient school, drawing additional dignity from a high cap, then out of date, and a black silk gown. Everything about and around her was in keeping with her air of old-fashioned service—she sat in an uncompromisingly

upright posture, as if arm-chairs were made, not for relaxation, but for the practice of self-denial: her figure was tall and lean, and her expression, as well as her features, sharp, formal, and severe, as if she had diligently cultivated a natural genius for unbending gravity. One would as soon look for a smile from her as from that bleak March evening. There was only one note of disorderly discord in the whole room—and that was Milly.

Tumbling about all over the floor, now under the table, now half between the bars of a chair old enough to have played with her great grandmother, now clattering with the fire-irons, now threatening to drag down the table-cloth and all arranged upon it with such precision, was that sore trial to a lover of order. She was a very small girl indeed, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed after the ultra-English pattern, just old enough to find life and mischief different words for the same thing, and not a day older—next to a terrier

puppy in being out of place wherever a Mrs. Tallis might happen to be.

Nor, while Mrs. Tallis expressed her opinions freely, was Milly silent: but she spoke as yet too much in her own and too little in her mother tongue to be readily understood by any but a mother's ears. Nevertheless, Mrs. Tallis, that pattern of mature severity, seemed to understand it as if her own babyhood had been a thing of yesterday: she answered every capricious demand for this or that—so long as it was not for knives, beer, or lighted candles—as soon as it was made. She translated at once the particular look into her face that meant “spectacles”—and, while keeping up every appearance of dignity, immediately obeyed. The knife might hurt Milly, but Milly could only hurt the spectacles.

No doubt if Milly had not been more than a little spoiled she would have been in bed and asleep by this time, for the sun had shut his eyes long ago. And if she, with the magical

instinct of her age, had not been able to translate the housekeeper's querulous scoldings into a hidden meaning, she could not have enjoyed herself so thoroughly in the stiff old lady's company. In short, these two unlikenesses were both thoroughly comfortable, each in her own way, though their comfort lay in mischief on one side, and in blame on the other. It was as well they were, for the fire could not keep the room warm, and the windows rattled in the east wind—March had come in his lion-skin that year. At last, however, the mixture of warmth and cold, of noise and quiet, took one very natural effect—Mrs. Tallis's head gave a nod forward, and Milly was left free to pull off the table-cloth, if she pleased, undisturbed.

It may be that the old lady even dreamed—perhaps of being called upon to set chaos in order with Milly behind to undo her work as soon as it was done: more likely—for the dream-earth circles backwards round the sun

A DOG AND HIS SHADOW.

—of days before she was wife or widow, and when she, too, had other matters to think of than keeping things straight and square. But in any case her dream was connected with a crash of some sort, for she woke with a start at the exclamation—

“Oh, Mrs. Tallis, ma’am! Oh, ma’am, if there isn’t burglars at the front door!”

The bearer of this alarming news was a country girl, red-faced and red-haired, who had bounced into the room in all the excitement of terror—not a wholly unpleasant sensation for one of her order when combined with the satisfaction of being the first bearer of ill news.

“Burglars!” exclaimed Mrs. Tallis, starting up and glancing instinctively at one particular corner cupboard. “Nonsense, Susan. You’re terrified if you hear a mouse squeak, I do believe.”

“Didn’t you hear the bell, ma’am?” asked Susan below her breath, as if afraid the burglars might hear.

"No—nor you. The idea of burglars ringing a bell!"

"The bell did go, ma'am—I heard it as plain as I see you. Pr'aps you was taking a nap, ma'am?"

"I taking a nap! Gracious! I never did such a thing since I was born. It's you were asleep, Susan; and what's more, you must be asleep now, or you'd never dream such a thing. It's impertinent—why, I should have heard a pin drop, let alone a bell. We usedn't to sleep except in our beds when I was a girl—but girls were different then. Look there, if you haven't allowed Miss Milly to tumble into the coal-box again with your non-sensical fancies, and her frock only clean—ah!"

There was no mistake about it this time. A bell clashed and jarred through the house as if pulled by one who wanted to break the wire.

Mrs. Tallis started, and Susan shook from head to heel. "There, ma'am!" she said,

with trembling triumph. "That's what I heard!"

"Who in the name of gracious can it be?"

"Pr'aps if we don't take no notice they'll go away. If only John Carter hadn't been but five minutes gone—Oh, ma'am, there it goes again!"

And sure enough the bell clanged for a third time, more loudly than before.

"Thieves or no thieves, I must go and investigate who's there," said the housekeeper decisively. "Take Miss Milly while I go to the front door."

Susan picked up the unfortunate Milly, who, finding herself neglected in the confusion, set up an unseasonable wail. Mrs. Tallis, for once paying no attention, pulled a shawl over her head and went along a passage into the dark, empty entrance hall, from which led a broad, uncarpeted flight of stone stairs. Having carefully put up the chain, she opened the front door about the space of an inch, and asked, boldly and sharply—

"Who's there?"

"Be this here place Winbury, miss?" answered a man's gruff voice, in an accent that did not belong to Eastingtonshire and of a hoarseness known in every shire where spirits are sold.

"Of course it's Winbury. A gentlemanlike thing indeed to pull people's bells down to ask if this is Winbury."

"Hold a bit, miss—don't smash my nose betwixt post and door. Where's the doctor?"

"What doctor?"

"The medical practitioner, ma'am—the gentleman that tinkers up the flesh-pots, ma'am, like I do the tin-pots—where's he?"

"There's no doctor."

"Parson, then?"

"There's no parson."

"Squire, then? Maybe he lives here?"

"There's no squire."

"Who be there, then, if there ben't no doctor, nor no parson, nor no squire?"

"There's nobody—that's all. If you want a medical man you must go on to Westcote."

"Thankye, ma'am. And how far may that be?"

"Seven miles, if you go the short way."

"Seven mile! Don't *nobody* live at Winbury, ma'am? Can't I see the master—or the good lady, if there ben't no squire?"

"There's no lady."

"Well, I am blessed then! Ben't there nothing in Winbury, ma'am? Ben't there never a blessed soul to keep a poor wench from dying like a dog in a ditch nearer than seven mile—the short way? Don't Winbury profess and call itself Christian? I'm Cornelius Boswell, ma'am, well known as I may say half over England as renovator of hardware, and by appointment umbrella-mender in ordinary to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, as is proved by what's painted on my travelling workshop I've left standing in the road: but I've been a parish clerk, ma'am, so I know what a parish ought to be, and as a

travelling tradesman I know what most of 'em are : but if ever I heard tell of so much as a extra-parochial like Winbury, smash me flat, ma'am—and I can't say no fairer."

Mrs. Tallis had been about to slam the door in the face of so suspicious a visitor when something deeper than her ear was caught by three words that would have made him even more suspicious in the ears of many a person of an aspect far less severe than hers.

"What's that—a woman in a ditch?" she asked, even more sharply than she had answered.

"Dying in one, ma'am—that's what I said : not drunk, poor soul—p'raps there ben't no public in Winbury?" he asked, with would-be biting sarcasm, as if to pique the parish into action by an accusation of having reached the lowest depth of degradation. "And I were told—by—by a —sort of a chap as how there was a kind-hearted lady here—as might be your own self, ma'am"—

"Then I'm sure you weren't informed any such nonsense. There's no lady—I'm Mrs. Tallis the housekeeper. What woman? What's the matter with her? Where is she?"

"Well, ma'am, she be a dying woman, as I don't know from Eve. As to where, it may be a matter of two mile along the canal. As to matter, a lady that's got one of her own, as I can hear crying out now, bless its heart, might be able to tell better than me, not being in the family line."

"Then why in the name of gracious didn't you inform me at once, instead of prevaricating round about the bushes? Susan!—Run out to the Vane Arms"—

("Then there *be* something in Winbury!" muttered the tinker.)

"And request them to send their cart up along the road to discover if there's a young person requiring assistance—tell them to stop at the lodge gate, and I'll accompany. And, Susan—when you've been there, run to

Mr. Pottinger's—the constable's," she added in a higher key so as to be heard more distinctly through the door, "and request him to come up here at once—it may be a device to get me out for somebody to get in. Then run back and mind Miss Milly while I'm gone. Quick—never mind your bonnet—your apron will do—give me Miss Milly—and go out the back way."

"It's a uncommon cold night, ma'am," said the tinker, encouraged by her sudden and rather impulsive thaw. "If we've got to wait for a cart, ma'am, I wouldn't mind setting down on a hall chair. The way I've puffed and blew on this here arrant of mercy, ma'am, has gone nigh to split my bellus. And running's but dry work, at best," he added meditatively, as if enunciating a general proposition without personal application.

But the doctrine was thrown away upon unsympathetic ears.

"You'll find the pump just round the

corner," said Mrs. Tallis, and slammed the door.

The tinker did not go to the pump. But neither did he move towards the Vane Arms. He waited on the doorstep, audibly stamping his feet and thrashing himself with his arms, to keep his blood going. After a long five minutes the door opened again to the limit of the chain.

"Are you still there?" asked Mrs. Tallis.

"Here I be, ma'am," said the tinker sulkily. "Here be this here species of a travelling tradesman, wet out and dry in."

"Then as the constable has arrived, and as I am going to the lodge to wait for the conveyance, there's no manner of occasion for you to hang about my door."

"I know that, ma'am, without telling. That be what they call gratitude, that be—a chap gives you a chance of helping a fellow creature, and you send him to the pump to drink your health for 'it. Blessed if I ever ask anybody to be charitable again. Never

mind, ma'am. A man that's said Amen as many times as I have gets to act up to it somehow. I'll look to my reward hereafter, and put up with a lift in the cart this go. I've left my workshop standing, ma'am, and being more trustful of human nature than you, ma'am, I didn't think to put up the chain."

"Very well," said Mrs. Tallis shortly, as she at last left the house, carrying a horn stable lantern to light her down the avenue. By its dim light she saw a shabby, slouching fellow in thread-bare clothes, who, counting by the fallacious arithmetic of years, was apparently in the noontide of his days, but whose shambling gait, stooping shoulders, and cheeks wherein many a tumbler had blossomed, displayed little of the vigour of noon. It is true that a certain amount of personal unattractiveness might be pardoned on a night when even a Good Templar's nose must have looked swollen and blue. But, from many significant signs, the state of the

tinker's nose seemed due less to acute cold without than to chronic warmth within. For his part he could not fail to be very differently impressed by the tall, upright figure now wrapped in a long blue cloak, and the hard, thin face surrounded by a bonnet of a fashion as old as his own hat, than which nothing could be older. Though she had assumed only the title of house-keeper, he could not but feel himself in the presence of a personage of consequence—perhaps of the first consequence in a village that appeared to possess no regular aristocratic order. Her studied choice of words was calculated to impress an ex-parish clerk, and therefore a scholar: and as a travelled man of the world he must have known that the stinginess which the state of his throat betokened is the very strongest evidence of the very highest respectability.

She had made all her preparations for combining charity with the safety of the front door in the shortest time possible: but

the quickest action, supposing the tinker's tale to be true, implied terrible delay. Happily the landlord of the Vane Arms had been able to send his cart promptly: it was waiting at the end of the long beech avenue, with a man in a smock frock to drive it, so that not a minute was wasted in listening for the sound of wheels. There are parishes, must the tinker have thought, where countesses are not obeyed with the alacrity that Mrs. Tallis the housekeeper seemed to command.

He did not think how it is not every great lady, or small lady either, who would have left a warm fireside, late on a bitter winter's evening, and have ridden a couple of miles in a jolting cart to help an unknown wayfarer whose very existence was open to doubt, at the bidding of a strange tinker. He did not try to reconcile her stingy denial of a drop of beer to himself with her readiness to give more than money's worth to another. Without diving into the depths of

his mind, this much is certain, for the simple reason that his mind was furnished with more interesting food. The skirt of the housekeeper's cloak partly covered a basket: from the basket projected the neck of a bottle: and the tinker's mind's nose smelt brandy in the air.

No doubt the man in the smock frock made all the haste in his power, but the plough horse was leaving his stable behind him, and dragged on the heavy, springless cart as if he thought that the slower he went out the sooner he should be at home again. The road was good enough, being as straight as the crow's flight and as level as the canal that ran with it. But it gave no shelter. It lay between two low cropped hedges, dividing it from the towing path on one side, and from an unbroken stretch of flat fields on the other, so that the weather had free play to do its worst, and was doing it. The east wind was luckily behind them, but the wind itself was hardly needed to add to the

dreariness of that unspeakably cold, dark, and dreary ride. Mrs. Tallis showed no sign of impatience but silence, though she must have found a new meaning in the phrase "As cold as charity." The tinker, however, became fidgety, and began to hum through his nose the tune of the Old Hundredth Psalm, beating time with his feet among the straw.

The wind having a clear sweep over open fields, was silent in its strength: nor is the east wind given to bluster before stabbing. The faintest moan by the wayside would therefore have been audible, and it could only have been Mrs. Tallis's thick and close bonnet that kept her from knowing what made the driver pull in the horse suddenly. The tinker started up, held the lantern above his head, and looked forward.

"Hold hard there!" he said. "Don't run over my truck, whatever you do. Here we are, ma'am."

He shambled out. Mrs. Tallis took the lantern from him, and went straight to the roadside. Stooping down and adjusting her spectacles carefully, she saw a young girl lying under the hedge, just as the tinker had said, dressed in a common print gown not over new or over clean, and wearing a straw hat and thin shawl. She could not have been more than twenty years old, and was a complete stranger to Winbury. Indeed, she was obviously not a country girl at all, though to what class she belonged it was impossible to tell, except that she could not have been very high in the scale. Her features were good, but their expression was hard to read, and her eyes were closed. For the rest, she was lying as calm and quiet as if the driving wind were the warm air of a pleasant bed-chamber, and the hard wayside a bed of down. Mrs. Tallis touched her lightly—not even her heart stirred.

“Quite cold,” said Mrs. Tallis after a pause. “We’re too late by a full hour—

poor young thing! Lift her up into the cart—gently, mind. What are you standing like a wooden image for?” she said to the carter with extra sharpness to make up for her lapse into pity. “Can’t you move?”

“I can move, ma’am. But it aren’t what I call straightforward to hear a dead woman squeal. I’d send for the constable, ma’am, if I was you—’twas all one as if that there wailed like a child.”

“What!” said the tinker. “Then I’m”—— But, whatever he was, he was not afraid of spirits; perhaps, like another philosopher, he had seen, and swallowed too many to be afraid, and he did not hesitate to stoop over the girl.

Mrs. Tallis also stooped down hurriedly and pulled aside the shawl. When she rose up she held a tiny human creature in her arms—perhaps alive. Had not the child already been clothed, after a fashion, it was as if they had witnessed a visible transmigration of souls—as if the spirit of the mother

had in the moment of death taken upon itself a new body, unaccountably refusing to part from a cold east wind and a hard highway that some solitary memory had made too beautiful to leave.

It was only for a second that the carter or the tinker caught sight of the child. Mrs. Tallis wrapped it up closely in her cloak, seated herself in the cart again, and did her best to warm Milly's fellow creature against her breast. Maybe it was the concentration of all her warmth there that made her face and her speech so chill.

"Do you want us," asked the carter, relieved of his ghostly fears, "to heave that there dead 'un up in the cart along of you?"

"Yes; and be quick. How would you like your own corpse to be left on the road out in the cold? Poor young thing! a baby not a week old if it's a day, and a married woman too. I wonder where the man is who put on that ring? I must investigate," she went on, now fairly recovering the elegance of diction

that plain-speaking pity had interrupted, "and see if there's anything in her pockets that can inform. It's a gratification all the same that we've not been assisting a—how's this? Why, I could take my oath and testament—wasn't there now, John Carter? Wasn't there a gold ring on her married finger this very minute ago?"

"Sure there were, missis. I seen't."

"Where is it now, then? And where's that man?"

And where was the brandy bottle? Tinker and truck had seemingly been blown away by the wind, and the bottle and the ring after them.

CHAPTER II.

From hidden nooks the dust to sweep,
To scrub from floor to beam :
To guard the cheese from mice : to keep
Grimalkin from the cream :
Time by his foremost lock to clutch,
Nor fail to bolt the door—
A statesman may do half as much—
A king can do no more.

“SEVEN times three’s eighteen, seven times four’s twenty-four, seven times five’s twenty-three, seven times six is”——

“What’s that?” asked the schoolmaster, shortly and sharply, as if to make believe that he had not been in a brown study. “What do you say is six times seven?”

“Please, sir,” stammered the mathematical genius, in an injured tone, “I aren’t got to

dodging, I aren't, sir. It's in seven times I be—I are."

"Begin again, then. Seven times one—yes," reckoned the schoolmaster to himself, as the sing-song drone began again, "Seven times one!—it's the first step is hardest, I've read; but, if the world is ruled by numbers, as Pythagoras taught, the first step is one times one—the easiest step of all. Any way, well begun is half done; and nobody that I ever read about, in Plutarch, or the Lives of the Poets, or anywhere, has begun half so well as I. At one-and-twenty to have mastered all human knowledge—to have all literature at my fingers' ends—to be already a man of mark as far as Eastington, and maybe farther, for aught I know—and to be a poet besides, is to begin where others have left off. I have only to put out my hand and lay hold of the prize. Only to escape from this wretched drudgery was wanting, and now, like a godsend, comes this eighty pounds a year—three times eight is twenty-four—two

hundred and forty pounds in three short years. Why, in one year of freedom I shall have finished my Epic, my Wars of the Stars—

Far orb'd Methratton, whom no weaker gaze
Than Seraphs', eagle-eyed with love, hath seen:
Razael, the lord of Wisdom, darkly known—
The seven that sway the world and they that rule
The four times seven mansions of the moon"——

"Is twenty-eight, five times seven's twenty nine"——

Down came the schoolmaster's hand upon the ear of the unlucky urchin who had interrupted his reverie. "Do you think because I haven't stopped your blunders I haven't heard them? Go down, and write out seven times on your slate two hundred and forty times—in three short years. It's twelve o'clock—be off with you all."

The church clock had not struck, but it was known to be slow, and the schoolmaster was even more eager to get rid of his scholars than they were to be rid of him. They caught

up their caps in a moment and were off with a shout: he seized his pen, and jotted down on the fly-leaf of a primer the contribution to his epic wherewith the multiplication table had unconsciously inspired him. Then he dashed off about a dozen more lines of the same sort; and the church clock struck one before he left the school-room and locked the door. Then he took the path across the fields that leads to a door at which a tinker once stood some twenty years ago. And while he is on his way, with his feet on the dull earth, and his mind, blind to the sunshine round him, among the stars, it will be useful to learn how it came about that any man came to dream of anything loftier than turnips within sound of the church clock of Winbury.

For Winbury, where the schoolmaster had just missed being born, defies poetical description as much as a blank sheet of paper whereon a portrait is only about to be drawn. Nature and history have been transcendently

bountiful to England, but both have been stepmothers to Winbury: they have stepped over it, and left no footprint behind. It is just an uninteresting jumble of cottages—village is too picturesque a word—surrounded by wide, staring fields, without hill, wood, river, or sea. It is neither valley nor table land. Its *flora* consists of turnips, osier beds, and pollard willows; its *fauna* of sheep, turkeys, cart-horses, and the men and women who serve them; its water of a straight canal; its visitors of bargemen; its interest of exactly nothing. It has no antiquities, no battle-field, no abbey, no castle, no celebrated tomb. It is the birth-place of nobody. Its church is a barn with a dwarf tower, of no period in particular. Its great men have been great only in the sense in which Daniel Lambert was a great man: for the thick, damp air, blown straight from Dutch dykes by the east winds, and from the fens by the others, nourishes bodies but starves brains. Thus, save for the bargees, who are neither ob-

servant nor communicative by nature and have few sympathies with the native population, Winbury is given over to the passive contemplation of its own emptiness. The tinker had been told what was practically, if not literally, true, when he heard that its few souls were left uncared for. The Vicar was a deaf old man, petrified by the air of Winbury, devoted to one object and one passion. His passion was a detestation of everything that he chose to class under the head of "Whiggery": his object, to conceal his hardness of hearing. With this view he never appeared except in church, where he could speak without being spoken to, fed his indignation with newspapers for the rest of the week, remained unmarried, kept no curate, and had gradually forgotten the very names that he himself had given to his own parishioners. The offices of cook and housemaid to the Vicar were in the hands of a sort of village clique, that hired or withdrew its own nominees, without troubling the master, according

to its own interest or convenience. There was no doctor, as the tinker had been accurately told, nearer than Westcote, and the great house—the old Manor House, as it was called—belonged to an attorney at the county town of Eastington, who had foreclosed as mortgagee and found himself unable to dispose of his undesirable acquisition. Accident, therefore, had conspired with nature to render Winbury a sort of geographical outlaw.

Nevertheless here, as elsewhere, the world spun round, though not giddily. Men and women were born, married, and died effectively, though without the sanction of the *Times*' supplement. Not even the *Eastington Mercury*, the Vicar's *bête-noire* as the organ of county Whiggery, condescended to advertise in the list of births, "On a date unknown, at a place unknown, a woman unknown, of a son." For that matter, notice was never sent; and, if it had been, it could not have been paid for. A shilling, found in the dead girl's pocket, was absorbed in funeral ex-

penses. Rarely does a flourish of trumpets announce the entrance of a Poet into the world; but still more rarely has even a poet come down from the stars with less noise than he who, by a Sunday inspiration of the Vicar, was christened Abel, as being at any rate a son of Adam.

An inquest, at which Mrs. Tallis and the carter gave evidence, resulted only in a verdict "in accordance with the facts," as the phrase is. It was held at Westcote workhouse, and the woman was buried in Westcote churchyard. No doubt, had Milly been her own child, the housekeeper would have sent the foundling to Westcote and have held, not unjustifiably, that her duty was done. The hearts of fathers and mothers seldom contain spare rooms. But Milly was only her brother's orphan, whom she had taken, as she had taken the foundling, straight from a mother's death-bed; and she, a childless widow, had felt the chambers of her heart open wide, at Milly's first touch,

to all children for ever. It was hardly a year since Milly's mother had died in Eastington ; and she could not but picture to herself the thought of Milly in Abel's roadside cradle. The apparent injustice of destiny struck her as keenly as it must all who have not learned to combine the broken letters that spell Providence into the whole word.

"No," she said, sharply and crossly, when her friend Mr. Pottinger suggested the workhouse as Abel's natural home. "If I thought that was my obligation, I oughtn't to have preserved him. A union's worse than a prison is, and more shame."

"Ay, for you or I, but they that comes of shame must be shamed. Third and fourth generations, the Bible says"—

"The Bible don't tell us to shame them. And there's no shame when there's a wedding ring. Don't assert there wasn't one, for I saw it as sure as I see you. 'Twould be to contradict my own eyesight to let the child go to the union."

"Well, the parish won't mind not paying for strays these hard times. But what about the young customer's keep? Won't you have to give a bit of a shake to the old stocking?"

Mr. Pottinger, as an official, might presume to venture upon a playful allusion to the housekeeper's foible, but she was proof against humour.

"There are more methods of killing a—— of doing things than one, Mr. Pottinger. You are aware the young woman I keep to assist me is going to be married to John at the Vane Arms on Sunday week?" (If the tinker had known this he might have been less surprised at the promptitude with which the housekeeper's message had been obeyed—the message may have been less efficacious than the messenger.) "I have always considered her an unjustified extravagance now that Miss Milly wants less momentary superintending: so I've spoke to Mrs. Herrick, who's just lost her ninth, who'll be glad to take the infant to get my charing. So I shall

be more profitable than not. Mrs. Herrick will come to me at odd times for less than I spend on Susan, and she'll earn more by having nine infants to do for than if she possessed only her eight own."

"Well, you be a clever one, missis!" said Mr. Pottinger, impressed with this ingenious device for making charity a paying speculation. "I believe if you was to throw that old stocking of yours into the canal somehow or other the richer you'd be. I wish I knew how to spend my half-pence and keep 'em too, that's all."

The immediate result of Mrs. Tallis's determination to find a plausible excuse, such as the whole world might approve, for being charitable, was that the mind of the foundling first opened upon the interior of a clay cottage, where he shared slices of stale bread and the surname of Herrick with eight foster brothers and sisters, from whom he was distinguished by his being younger than the youngest by

many years, and by answering to the name of Abel.

And now, What will become of him? No human being ever made a cleaner start, less hampered with circumstances of birth and parentage that pull most of us this way or that, and hardly give us a chance of taking a road for ourselves. Winbury was a blank, like the middle of the old maps of Africa. The Herrick family, though numerous, was a blank, like the social and moral map of Winbury. It is on record that somebody once, by dint of exquisitely minute handwriting, enclosed the whole Iliad in a nutshell. Upon this text hundreds of volumes have been written to prove that the entire human character, with all its passions, sentiments, and emotions, can be read legibly in the narrowest of skulls. The old playwrights and romancers, who had no microscopes, studied kings and heroes. We think it higher art to study ourselves. Human nature is human nature, we say, and why trouble

history or the great stage of the world for materials of study when the smallest hamlet contains more tragedies and comedies than we can read in a lifetime? Alas for theory!—human nature was written upon the brains of the Herrick family in characters so infinitesimally small, and enclosed in shells so prodigiously thick, that forceps and microscope are for once at fault—much less could the unaided eyes of a child draw any food for the growth of his own nature therefrom.

So it seemed to be decided by destiny that Abel Herrick's biography was to be written thus:—He was born: he scared crows: he hoed turnips: he waited on horses: he married: he toiled in order to eat bacon, and wasted his toil on beer: he grew bent with rheumatism, shook with ague, came upon the parish, and died. Such was the whole of life as known to the Herricks of Winbury; and, if man was made to live, there was enough tragedy in it to make farther search very needless indeed.

Abel began this hopeful career in the usual way. Mrs. Herrick, though burdened with eight growing children of her own, did her duty by him according to her lights ; for the charing engagement, though it brought her more work than pay, was worth keeping. Mrs. Tallis seemed ever bent upon proving that a kind-hearted skin-flint is not a contradiction in terms. She retained her interest in the child whom she had saved from death and Westcote, and, as he grew old enough to be mischievous without being quite old enough for a scare-crow, she allowed Mrs. Herrick to bring him up to the old Manor House on charing days, so that he and "Miss Milly" could be kept in sight by one pair of eyes at a time.

Why the old Manor House stood in need of such perpetual scrubbing and dusting was known to Mrs. Tallis alone. In former days it had belonged to an old Eastingtonshire family of the name of Vane, and one of the family had once lived there—a proof of

striking eccentricity. For the Vanes had another place in another part of England ; and no ordinary mortal who had as much as a castle in Spain would have deliberately chosen to live at Winbury. This one Vane of Winbury would have been called a humourist in the days of the *Spectator* when people were less of the same pattern than they are now : he would have been called crazy in our own. Living somewhere between the two eras people did not know what to call him. Either disappointed love, or misanthropy, or a passion for study, or morbid shyness led him to bury himself with his books out of the world—nobody knew, or ever will know, the cause, and very few cared. His heirs were anything but hermits or book-worms ; and from them the old Manor House passed into the hands of the Eastington attorney. And in his hands it was likely to remain, a bad bargain, lying like a log on the estate market and producing next to nothing. So it stood without lord or lady, and Mrs. Tallis, who

had been housekeeper before the foreclosure, stayed on, only receiving her wages from Mr. Smith of Eastington instead of the Vanes. So long had she lived there that the dream of a possible change never entered her head, while the villagers, easily taking for granted any established order of things, looked upon her as prescriptive Queen of Winbury rather than as only vice-reine. She, as an ex-lady's maid and actual housekeeper, belonged to the most aristocratic class in the world. She stood upon every inch of the dignity that had grown upon her like the moss over the old beech-trees in the broad park, wore a black silk gown as its outward and visible sign, and in the same spirit never spoke of her little niece, a small working watchmaker's orphan, but as "Miss" Milly. The one break in her long life of service had been Mr. Tallis, a young tradesman at Norwich, who had married her from her lady's maid's place, and left her a widow many a long year ago. He was supposed to have left her what is called

•

“warm”; but that was her own affair. She certainly did not spend more than her wages, and was not above working hard for them.

Whatever her circumstances might be, the old-fashioned servant was an old-fashioned servant still, heart and soul. Never a guest set his foot in the old Manor House from year's end to year's end; but it was her duty and therefore her pride, her pride and therefore her duty, to keep it as if she were at the head of a great household in full hospitable glory. How else, before Miss Milly came, was she to pass the time? So, living in two small rooms, she spent from morning till night in the never-ending but congenial toil of a dozen housemaids; and when Miss Milly came, that new interest in life came too late to break through her second nature. Dusting was her career, hoarding her hobby: and Milly was the sympathetic touch, the better part, that somehow turned the good woman's oddities and inconsistencies into a harmonious and not unkindly whole.

The old Manor House itself, though huge and rambling, took nothing from the uninterestingness of Winbury. It is only to be described by a catalogue of negatives. It was not an Elizabethan romance in grey stone; it was not a Georgian novel in red brick; it was not even sham Elizabethan, or mock feudal, or any other insane attempt to make raw youth mimic the beauty of age. It was simply very ugly, very large, and belonged to the period of once upon a time. It had a moat without water, a garden without flowers, a stable without horses, and a park without deer. Within, it was convenient enough, but terribly depressing. Its square windows looked over flat fields, its relics of useless furniture were carefully sewn up in ghostly white canvas, its floors and walls were bare. Not even a painted landscape was there to teach a native of Winbury what is meant by a river or a hill. A little natural dust would have been a relief—but that was not allowed.

But, for all its overpowering order and cleanliness, it was a splendid place to play in. Nothing is without a purpose; and hide and seek was the purpose of the old Manor House at Winbury. Milly and Abel, who were much of an age, were playmates on charing days, and did their very best to give Mrs. Tallis's duster some real work to do. The good woman, being only too well pleased in her heart at finding a new excuse for putting things to rights, grumbled so much over her pleasure that Abel thought her an ogress. Milly, however, was either bolder or sharper-eyed; the more she was scolded, the more she tried to deserve a scolding, and seldom failed.

One charing day, however, was destined to stand out from the regular round of playing, falling out, making up, mischief, scolding, and slices of bread and gooseberry jam. Abel, now just beginning to outgrow his first corduroys—"whistlers" they were called in Winbury—went with Mrs. Herrick as usual

to the Manor House, and felt that Mrs. Tallis was more than commonly solemn and grim. Her face was doubly hard, and there was extra sharpness in her tone as she began—

“I was on the very point of coming to inquire if you were indisposed, Mrs. Herrick.”

“Ma’am?”

“Indisposed—ill.”

“Me, ma’am?”

“Nothing but gross indisposition can pardon unpunctuality. Gracious, can’t you comprehend plain words? I declare the ignorance of the people about here I should never find customary if I lived to be a centurion.”

Mrs. Tallis was clearly put out less with Mrs. Herrick than with the world at large—for Abel’s foster-mother, a poor soul with a husband and eight children, who was never in bed after five in the morning even on Sunday, knew neither the word unpunctuality nor the thing. Her employer would have been as just, and as sensible, if she had scolded a machine out of the dictionary.

"Of course it happens," went on Mrs. Tallis without noticing Abel, "just when you're late there's everything wants doing. Only because I chanced to be over at Eastington yesterday for half a day—the first time since my poor sister-in-law died—everything was at sixes and sevens when I returned—and if Mr. Smith had come, as of course he might any minute—but there, it's no manner of benefit standing talking. The best bedroom hasn't been properly attended to for a week at least—and if the moths"—

Mrs. Tallis and Mrs. Herrick went upstairs to discover, or rather to invent, something to do; and Abel, being left alone, set out to hunt for Milly. She very often began the day with hide and seek, and every time tried to tax Abel's detective powers more and more. She was fond of teasing him, and he, as a rule, submitted to be teased with much docility. But to-day, after hunting for her in every possible nook and corner both in and round the house—in cupboards, under chair

covers, in the well-bucket, in the wood-house, wherever it was possible to hide—his pride began to think that a game in which he was the loser had been carried on a little too far for his reputation. Still, she must be hid somewhere, and he was not going to be beaten by a girl; so, having exhausted all possible hiding places, he began upon the impossible. He opened all the drawers, looked up all the chimneys, and even thought for one wild instant of looking behind the few relics of the only resident master that the Manor House had known—some two hundred decaying volumes that stood upon rotten shelves in a room known as the library, as nearly as Winbury could pronounce the word. He touched one of the volumes, and lo, a miracle—there was dust in the old Manor House after all! Obviously Milly, bold and careless as she was, would never have dared to carry her frock, always as clean in the morning as the house itself, into such a corner. So he saved

himself the trouble of hunting where a mouse could not have hidden itself, and went into the empty drawing-room.

Here, upon an old broken what-not, stood a cracked china tea-cup; and into this he peered, not because he expected to find Milly there, but because she might be there all the same. He did not know how it happened, but suddenly he found himself still holding the handle while the cup lay shattered on the floor.

Such a dire mishap had surely never happened since the world was made. What was to be done? According to popular exaggeration of the value of the lumber at Winbury, the cup might be worth shillings and shillings for aught he knew. The finding of Milly was nothing to the immediate necessity of hiding the evidence of such a crime.

That was not easy, as he knew only too well. Not a nook of the old Manor House was safe for an instant from Mrs. Tallis's hand and eye, and bits of broken china were not things to be swallowed even by one whose

digestion had been trained upon Winbury cheese. If they could be thrown away out of doors the cunning of fear suggested that the peculiar pattern of the fragments would draw the attention of the first passer-by and be brought up in witness against him. If he dropped them down the well, the bucket would be sure to draw them up again. If he put them in his pockets—but alas, his pockets were in one important respect like the pit of Hades.

An inspiration! Since dust lay upon the top of the books in the library, it was clear that nobody ever looked behind them—there was one sanctuary in the house where something might be hidden and never be found. Pale with panic, he picked up the bits of crockery, crept back on tip-toe, shut the library door behind him, pulled out one of the tallest folios, and pushed the murdered body—it was nothing less, to him—behind the row.

Having thus disposed of the *corpus delicti*, he breathed freely. But hide and seek had

lost its savour. He could not push his conscience behind the folios. He was angry with Milly. She had beaten him at the game, and had been the cause of his getting into mischief like a blockhead and of getting out of it like a coward. No—let her wait up her chimney, or in her band-box, or wherever she was, till she was tired, and then let her come and look for him. To pass the time he sulkily opened the volume he had taken down and that still lay upon the floor.

Now Abel did know how to read. In the early times of talk about the schoolmaster being abroad Winbury had received a passing tap from his new cane. The Vicar had been compelled by public opinion round him, sorely against his will, to establish a schoolmaster. The only candidate who appeared in the field was a broken-down old rascal from Westcote, popularly supposed, in his own country, to have gained his unusual knowledge from a gaol chaplain. He—it is said—taking a hint from the Vicar's cook,

acted as if he were the patron of the office, presented himself to it, and never even reported himself to his nominal employer till his first quarter's salary was due. "I be John Crook, sir," he announced himself, taking care to shout as loud as he could, so as to flatter the Vicar's vanity. "I be the schoolmaster, sir, as you put in to teach them childer their grammar-learning, at twenty pound a year." "Schoolmaster, are you? How do you get on? Teaching the young chaw-bacons Greek I suppose—that's the sort of thing now." "Like a house a-fire, sir—like blazes. Got into two synnables afore you could wink your eye." "Before I could wink my eye, eh? We'll see about that, Mr. Crook, before we see about your twenty pounds a year. How do you teach them to spell Eye, if you please?" "I don't know what others may do, sir, but this is how I teaches 'em—H—I." "And a lucky thing for you that you do! If you'd changed a letter, Mr. Crook, I would *not* have winked my eye. Take your

twenty pounds, and don't bother me for another year. A rub for the Whigs, this time!"

Under this teacher Abel had learned to read better and faster than the Vicar would have quite approved—for the old rascal would have soundly boxed the ears of any urchin who spelled Eye to him as he spelled it to the Vicar. Whence it may be suspected that Mr. Crook knew something about the length of the Vicar's foot, if indeed the whole story was not an invention of the enemy, coined in the office of the *Eastington Mercury*. But the book whereon Abel's sulkiness had chanced to feed was a very different affair from the primer. Its contents looked as if all the spiders driven away by Mrs. Tallis's broom had spun their webs over its pages and had caught letters of the alphabet for flies that struggled about among wheels and waves in bewildering confusion. The fascination of mystery caught the boy's as yet unstunted mind like another fly. He forgot all about Milly, all even about

the broken tea-cup, in puzzling over what these scrawls might mean.

“Abel—what in the name of gracious are you doing there?”

He started up, shaking from head to foot, not only at the recollection of his crime, but at being caught red-handed at what might possibly be another—one also that might lead to a fatal search at the back of the shelves.

“I was afraid you were much too quiet to be out of mischief. Why, gracious, that’s one of the books of the library. You mustn’t appropriate the books—think if Mr. Smith was to come, as he might any minute, and was to miss anything out of its proper place, if it was only a book — and after all I’ve done to make everything suitable for Her Majesty to take her meals off the kitchen floor”——

The china cup had not been missed, that was clear. His conscience freed from the sin of discovery, Abel, in his all-devouring curiosity, almost forgot to be shy of the great lady of Winbury.

"Please, Mrs. Tallis, what's this, m'm, please?"

"Little boys should not ask questions. That's a book out of the library. And now, you know, you had better put it back where you took it from."

"But what's"—

"Bless the boy," she said, looking at the open book that he had lifted up for her to look at, "why about Sin, to be sure. There, s, i, n, sin."

"But what comes after Sin, please?"

"What a young troublesome you are. Log, to be sure."

"And after Log, please?"

"M—and that's—dear me, I'm afraid my spectacles aren't what they used to be—that's a cross—and then Tan—Log—P—two strokes—a long number. There—now you understand."

"But why's it wrote? What do it mean?"

"Mean? Why, Sin's wickedness: and Log's wood: and Tan's a colour in dogs."

"And the cross? and the lines?"

"Oh, they're inserted to fill up, like full stops. They always put those into books—for ornament, I suppose."

"But what's it all for?"

"Oh, because—because—it's a book, you see—people must put something into books, or else there wouldn't be any, and then there'd be no clever men."

"And what's that? What's a clever man?"

"A clever man's a wise man—a man that knows everything, and makes machines, and reads books, and—there, don't trouble any more. It's not possible you should understand."

"Do you, m'm?"

"Bless the boy! As if I had the time to think about cleverness. With a house like this on my hands, I can't idle over reading."

"How do people get clever, m'm?"

"Being born so, I suppose—and some of them go to college—and some of them by reading all the books in the world."

All this was pregnant with matter - for questioning: but Abel, with prococious aptitude for separating one grain of wheat from a bushel of chaff, only stared at the mysterious volume and said—

“Then I’ll read all the books in the world. I’ll be a clever man.”

“Well—I don’t mind your playing with them so long as you put them back again. It’ll keep you quiet, and the books dusted—I’ve always been meaning to attend to them myself, only the furniture takes up all my time. And you’ll want to be kept out of mischief now Milly” (this very sharply, as if to cut off the head of a sigh)—“now Milly’s gone to school.”

“What, m’m! Is Milly”——

“People say Miss when they’re talking of young ladies, Abel.”

“Miss Milly going to learn off old Crook, m’m, with the rest on us?”

“Old Crook indeed! She is gone to the best academy in all Eastington.”

“Will she—won’t she come back again?” asked Abel eagerly.

“Didn’t I order you not to ask questions? She’ll come home when she’s completed her education, not before.”

“So Milly’s gone for good!” thought Abel to himself. “Then I’ll read all them there books without being bothered, and if the cup’s found out I can say Milly did it, and nobody ’ll know.”

CHAPTER III.

There have been men who, trained in prison chains,
Shrink from the sun, and think the stars are stains :
Souls who, from Mother Nature's plenteous hand
That rains each morn new manna o'er the land,
Loathing will turn aside, and gorge themselves
With pecks of dust spread thick on mouldy shelves,
Dreaming—for nought they know save how to read—
That Printer's Ink was poured by Ganymede.

ABEL HERRICK, it was clear, had
already, without the aid of books,
taken the first step to being a clever man—
he had proved himself a clever boy. If only
for this reason he was not popular in his
generation : and his unpopularity made itself
felt in a singularly disagreeable form. Just
as a *parvenu* who only knows by hard guess-

work that he must have had a grandfather feels like a fish out of water among those who enjoy the inestimable privilege of knowing the Christian names of half a dozen ancestors, so the little village aristocrats, the children of a John Nokes or a Thomas Styles, managed to make their superiority felt by one whose whole pedigree consisted of a mother without a name—who did not even belong to Winbury. The taunts levelled at him on this head, with the plain-spoken frankness of pastoral simplicity, and in a vocabulary borrowed from the Barges, stung him with double force after his short spell of Milly's occasional companionship. His visits to the Manor House and the patronage of Mrs. Tallis were also strong grounds for jealous persecution, especially as he was by no means so ready to defend with his fists his mother's honour or his own skin as a true-born Winbury boy. He was not sorry, therefore, when his education was finished, and he was employed to swell the earnings

of the Herrick family to the extent of sixpence a week by shouting at rooks and crows. He welcomed the safety of solitude, and sought no companionship when the rooks went back to their nests and his day's work was done.

In many an out-of-the-way village a solitary farmer's or shepherd's lad, if he has the commonest stuff in him, may, and does, learn to be wise. If there had been a hillock or a rivulet within sight of the top of the church tower, if a single rose had shot up in the wasted garden of the Manor House, it would have served as a wholesome loop-hole for Abel's inner spirit to have spread tendrils out into the world. It may be said there were still the sky and the clouds: but these are not the first steps of Jacob's ladder. They must be climbed by slow degrees. And then the skies of Winbury were apt, in their little-varying shades of grey, to suggest a barren extension of space with nothing beyond it, while the

clouds generally took the form of low, unbroken mists, that only brought nothingness a little nearer to the world.

It was by way of an almost necessary compensation, or rather make-shift, that his caged and companionless spirit had, in one fatal moment, been seized with a sublime and irrevocable curiosity that would not suffer him to rest until he had searched out all the mysteries beyond the threshold on which he felt himself standing. He was allowed the free run of the Manor House book-shelves because he used his licence by indulging in the worst mischief of which a boy can be guilty—that of never making a noise. Of course at first, when his debauch, carried on during every spare hour, was new, he had to trust to blind chance for a guide. The very first book he began and finished was the old mathematical treatise, of which the symbols and abbreviations had proved too much for Mrs. Tallis's spectacles. Of course he might just as well have pored

over a Chinese manuscript ; but the combinations of letters and the strange figures he found in it were, in some inexplicable way, subtle stimulants to his imagination. Anything, so long as it is incomprehensible, will serve to fascinate virgin brains : they read unintended human faces, full of character, in the meaningless zig-zags of a carpet pattern, vague romances in the fireplace, and wonderful new landscapes in the cross-threads of a blank window blind.

And of piquant food for such greed of the unknown the Manor House library, with its couple of hundred volumes, furnished ample store. To judge from these fossils of his studies, the only Vane who ever lived at Winbury had measured the worth of human pursuits by their want of practical utility. After wading through his mathematical quarto, Abel attacked—because it was the largest and heaviest—a folio of heraldry, written for adepts, and gorgeous in the reckless splendour of German blazonry. Here was a new

and glorious universe to wander through, if not to conquer. The next volume was too much even for him to attack, for it was printed in Hebrew. The fourth—but it is needless to publish a catalogue *raisonné* of such relics of wasted time as had escaped the hammer of the auctioneer. Enough that incessant, undirected study, carried out, as Abel's powers of reason grew, by making book bear on book, line on line, and hint on hint, unrelieved by the companionship of any but dead and forgotten authors, and digested by days of open-air meditation, turned Abel Herrick into a monstrosity of learning. He could cast nativities: he had tried to square the circle: he could explain the mystic meaning of the most complex coat of arms: he knew the names and powers of all the angels and devils in the universe: he had mastered a commentary on the Cabala, and was versed in the Gnostic heresies. Combining these with Plutarch, he in no time invented a dozen new religions

and half a dozen political constitutions all absolutely inconsistent and absolutely true. There was nothing in his library to suggest that it was not an epitome of all human knowledge. It was almost a disappointment to him at first when one evening he fell upon a book that proved almost prosaically intelligible, by the side of the chaos through which he had been wading.

This was the "Faërie Queene."

A little knot of poets had gathered into a corner together, as if to guard *en masse* the main gate through which Abel's spirit might escape from Winbury. But he had found the gate, he plunged among its defenders, and then his spirit, hitherto grovelling in dust and rubbish, spread its wings and flew. He seemed to have found a talisman that gave life and form to his previous reading and that appeared to show the use of it all. Here was something not to be learned only, but to be done. No less eagerly than he saturated himself with verse, he pored over

the biographies that in some instances were bound up with it: and the lesson he learned was that poets are the gods and masters of the earth, and that nobody ever thinks of anything from morning till night, or dreams of anything from night till morning, but of spinning stanzas or criticising them when spun. Of course it never occurred to him, in a real and definite way, that the men of whom he read had ever lived out of the books they had written or the books written about them. He would have said he knew it if he had been asked, just as most of us know, after a fashion, that there was such a man as Julius Cæsar, but feel and think about him as if, instead of making history, he had been made by it. Of course Abel was aware of the difference, in theory, between fact and fiction, but in his heart Una and her lion were as real as he who invented them, and, by an inevitable process of confusion, their creator as unreal as they: and all was real and unreal at one and the same

time. To live meant to make verses, and he made them : to make verses, he gathered, it was necessary to love a woman—so he made a woman, and loved her in the grand style.

It may be that the verses he evolved with much labour were not quite as near Spenser's or Milton's as he believed. But, if not yet a poet, he had the spirit of one, cultivated not by nature, as the poetic spirit is supposed to be, but by years of close familiarity with heraldic nightmares and cabalistic chimeras, all painted in living colours upon Winbury for a background. If he was really to be a poet, for once a poet had not been born, but made.

But there comes a time when the most inveterate dreamer ceases to be content with worshipping the ideal princess of an enchanted castle in the air.

He was not discontented with his lot. He knew nothing of wealth and fame but as words he had read about—that is to say, as bubbles to be despised. Love and song, he

had learned, were the only things to be lived for, and he found nothing in his authors to suggest that these were inconsistent with the daily life of a thatcher and hurdle-maker—for such his foster-father was, and such he himself was to be. Winbury, it was true, had few of the attributes of Arcadia, but that was doubtless owing to the unfortunate accident of its being unprovided with an available Phillis or Chloe. More than once he tried very hard to identify some Susan or Betty with a heroine of pastoral romance, but the attempt had always broken down. But this was not altogether a misfortune. It secured him in undisturbed empire over his own dreamland, better than any possible reality. He wanted no sympathy. To others, he was a helping-hand to old Herrick the hurdle-maker, and not a very diligent or skilful hand: to himself, he was all that he had ever read of—a romance hero who led a life that was, in the spirit, actually fulfilled, and so beyond the power of any common-

place ideas about getting on in the world to disturb. But his genius for dreaming made it only the more uncertain what was to be the end—whether Winbury was to become famous at last, like many another hole and corner, as the home of a great peasant poet, or whether all this promise was to prove a mere flash in the brain-pan, and to be smothered into inglorious silence by the fogs that satisfy a man who thinks he has done all when he has dreamed that all is done.

Once the young man came across a tattered back number of the *Eastington Mercury*—that terrible organ to which he, according to the current legend, indirectly owed his power to distinguish A from B. It may seem miraculous, but he had never seen a whole newspaper in his life before. It was a greater curiosity to him than his own familiar books would have been to any ordinary reader. He read every word of it, even down to the advertisements—leaders, local gossip, time-hallowed puns, and all—and was

bewildered. The very English in which it was written was scarcely the English of the Manor House library. Imagine one who has read nothing printed since a hundred years ago suddenly falling upon a country journal of our own day, ignorant of its forms of putting things, its assumptions of familiarity with common topics and allusions, and of the history that has made every printed pen-scratch an efficient wheel in the world's machinery—and such was Abel Herrick the book-worm with the *Eastington Mercury* in his hands. Some book-notices told him that the making of many books had not come to an end. At first he felt himself shrivel up before this first blast from the real world. A crack seemed to have opened in one of the walls of a close cell and to have admitted, in the form of a chilling draught, what would have been a wholesome and bracing breeze if breathed in the open air. But gradually the amazement wore off, and for the first time in his career he felt a touch of intellectual vanity. First,

he came upon a misquotation from one of his own authors. Then he read a question from a Constant Reader that he could have answered off-hand. Then the style of the whole thing—especially, he thought, of the advertisements—wanted grace and dignity: if this was the sort of thing people wrote nowadays, they were grievously in want of an Abel Herrick to put them in the right way. And then there were some “Stanzas to Spring” in a corner of the sheet that struck him as falling short of what Spenser had done, and even of what he, Abel Herrick, could do if he tried.

Why should he not try?

It was an exciting question. He thought neither of praise nor of pudding—the bare dream of seeing his own verses in print and of their being read by other eyes than his own already promoted him to a laureateship at the Court of Apollo. He had no thought of taking his dreams to market: but for once he was not content with a barren dream.

Say, Cynthia, where art thou to seek ?
Say, Cynthia, where to find ?
I've asked of books—they cannot speak :
Of brooks, they're deaf and blind.

I've clambered every hillside up,
I've roamed around the land :
No ocean hides thee in his cup,
No mountain in his hand.

Say, Echo, where may Cynthia be,
And when will she appear ?
“Always, and everywhere,” saith she,
But never Now, nor Here.

If Abel had ever seen the hillside or the ocean of which he wrote so familiarly the lines would doubtless have been better, if not newer fashioned. But he thought very well of them himself. Having dropped his poem, as he called it, through the slit in the window of the general shop, feeling as if all the world stood staring round to see him do it, his mind felt relieved of a weight, and he returned to his thatching and hurdle-making for the benefit of his foster-family with as much content as a now professed poet could manage.

• He did not even work out any plan for

watching the future numbers of the *Mercury*. The very poem seemed his own no more, now that it had passed from his hands into those of the carrier.

But he was not quite so devoted to the library as heretofore. For one thing he knew the books by heart: and the more he tried to imitate them, the less they satisfied him. He thought, more and more, of the immortal Eve, and less and less of those who have tried to sing of her.


But one day—it was in the spring, when the swallows, the only travellers besides the bargees who ever visited Winbury, had arrived—Abel, after sunset, thought he would sup on Hippocrene instead of bread and cheese, and strolled up to the Manor House, now always opened to him. Habits and precedents easily grew up in Winbury. And, as he was crossing the piece of front garden where cabbages usurped the place of cabbage roses, an adventure befell him more extraordinary even than his opening that wonder-

ful mathematical folio. He saw a woman's gown that was not made of black silk.

That was marvel enough for one day, but it was nothing to what followed. Within the gown was a woman, who was not Mrs. Tallis the housekeeper.

He was seized with a shy fit, for the woman was young—as young as Susan, or Betty—but in most other respects startlingly different from any of the Winbury girls. To a lad who had wasted a great deal of valueless time in letting his thoughts run after imaginary princesses without ever having seen the ghost of one, she was much more than what she was in fact—a young and tolerably pretty girl, dressed quietly and becomingly in town fashion, but without bonnet or shawl.

Abel Herrick the poet knew, far more surely than his own existence, that he saw before him the Cynthia of his dreams. Instinct, inspiration, every orthodox word to express a determination to find what he



wanted to find, told him she had come at last, and this was she. In the first moment of his discovery he looked forward to going home and jingling her grey eyes into rhyme with Orion and Ursa Major, her light brown hair with golden threads, and her rosy cheeks with some impossible garden. Nor would he have found the task hard. For her grey eyes were really better worth meeting than if one had been a comet and the other the Koh-i-noor.

But if Abel had had his way, he would have rhymed about them first and met them afterwards—a common poetical process that may account for many prodigious and profoundly mystical things that have been said of eyes whether grey or brown. In a word, he was about to turn tail and run—for, in honest prose, the hunter far more often flies from the fawn than the fawn from the hunter. But his step on the gravel had made her turn round, not in a startled way, but simply to see who was there. And, if he was too shy to meet

her eyes, he felt that she had no objection to meet his, or any man's.

"Good evening," she said, nodding to him.

"Do you want to see Mrs. Tallis?"

It was not much of an entrance speech for Cynthia, but the voice in which it was spoken made the commonest speech pleasant to hear. It was soft, sweet and full: and the faintest note of provincialism—of course unmarked by Abel—was no more than just enough to give it character.

"No—nothing, thank you." He could not degrade the situation by calling her Miss, or Ma'am, though her muslin seemed to demand the title from his fustian.

"Ah, you want Mr. Adams, I suppose? If you'll wait a minute"—

Was she some Miss Adams then? The name did not please him—he would have preferred a name from his book of heraldry to connect her with some less remote but more euphonious ancestor.

"No—I only came—Mrs. Tallis knows me—I'm only Abel Herrick"—

"What!" she exclaimed, her face brightening, "You're Abel Herrick?—Abel?—*Only* my old playfellow? Why of course you are—only a few yards taller. Don't you remember Milly?" she asked, holding out her hand—not delicately white, but still the whitest Abel had ever seen.

He ventured to touch it with his fingers, as if afraid of soiling it. Surprise almost made him forget to be shy—almost that he had made up his mind to worship her.

"What—you're Milly!" he exclaimed, colouring up—let us hope for his old intention of laying his broken tea-cup on her shoulders in case of need. "Why, it's impossible!"

"I suppose everybody had forgotten there's such a being. I haven't, though—this is me, and glad to be at home again. I've had quite enough of school—and aunt would never let me come home even for the holidays,

she was so afraid of my not getting all the polish Miss Baxter could give me. She is the dearest old lady in the world—Aunt, I mean, not Miss Baxter. But I'm polished now for good. I hope—if I'm not real mahogany they've done their best to make me look so. And what are you doing now you're a man? You've not been troubled with old Crook as I have with Miss Baxter, I suppose? You see I haven't forgotten anybody's names—not even Jowler's at the Vane Arms—or Mr. Pottinger's Pepper—how are hey all? I *am* so glad to be home again!"

Milly did not speak volubly like a professed chatter-box, but only as if warm-hearted pleasure at meeting an old friend, obliged to show itself somehow, had set her tongue going.

But it was all a new strain to Abel, and he found himself seized by a dumb fiend. Milly naturally thought nothing of the embarrassment of a village lad before a stranger, and went back to himself—the topic upon which

everybody can speak who can speak at all.

"You haven't told me what you've been doing?"

"I? Oh—I've been making—hurdles."

"You must show me how they're made.—Please don't let me drive you away—I suppose we must all be well-behaved now, but if I'd only known you were coming I *would* have hid myself, just once more, like I used to. Won't you come in? We were just at tea—only I ran out to look round the old place before it got too dark to see. Come in."

Abel went in—he was now almost too shy to follow, but he was quite too shy to refuse. Moreover, he was in the condition that is retrospectively called love at first sight when love follows it. Milly led him into the house-keeper's snug little parlour—he would have followed her over the edge of a precipice.

"Good evening, Abel," said his patroness. Unable to forget that she had saved his life, she bridged over the natural distance between

the lady-lieutenant of Winbury and one of the villagers by treating him as a sort of poor relation to the Manor House. "I suppose you have called to pay your respects to my niece, Miss Barnes." (She was to be Miss Barnes, then, to the Winbury people—not even Miss Milly any more; and the name of Adams was not much improved upon.) "You had better remain, and take a cup of tea. This is young Abel Herrick, Mr. Adams," she said to another person at the tea-table, "who used to play with my niece sometimes, when they were infants together, before she went to the seminary. I suppose you would not have recognised her, Abel? Don't you think she has progressed extraordinary?"

Abel recovered the use of his eyes: and they told him that he was in the presence of a mortal foe. Or rather he knew that war was as necessary as love to the romance on which he was predetermined, and he told his eyes to tell him so.

Mr. Adams was indeed well qualified to excite jealousy at first sight in a rustic lover. He was a young man, passably good looking, in spite of a turned-up nose, pinkish eyes, and the pimpled complexion that often accompanies the transformation of down into full blown whiskers. The curve of the nose and the smiling lips signified to Abel a placidly impudent and intolerably exasperating self-satisfaction. His hair was beautifully combed, parted behind and before, glossy with pomatum, and rising from the forehead in elaborate ripples. His shoulders were to Winbury shoulders what a graceful bottle of Rhine wine is to a sturdy bottle of bitter ale. His dress was even more than elegant. His coat was of brown velveteen, his neckcloth of crimson silk, his waistcoat white, his trousers shepherd's plaid, with a broad bottle-green stripe down the seams. He wore a watch-guard, a scarf-pin, and a ring. Evidently some fine gentleman from Eastington—and what should such a phoenix be doing in

Winbury? It was hard upon Abel. He fancied that if there had been nobody else in the housekeeper's room he should soon have shown Milly that he was something better than a hurdle-maker, just as the coward always believes that he would have been bold if it had not been for the one little accident that always contrives to happen.

Mr. Adams just recognised the introduction by a condescending nod; Abel, by an ungracious half bow.

"I was just telling your aunt, Miss Barnes," said Mr. Adams, "how all your young ladies ran to the windows when I drove up in my trap to fetch you away. I b'lieve they thought you was off with a young marquis at least—'twas a regular fluttering of the dove-cot in Corry Holy."

"In Corioli," said Abel brusquely.

The young man stared. "How much a yard?" he asked facetiously. "Never heard of the party. Give him my best respects when you see him, and say I'm pretty well,

thank you. No—no more tea, thank you—unless Miss Barnes will leave out the sugar this time: it comes sweet enough from the pot when she holds the handle. I told all the fellows at the office I was going off with an heiress—and split me, if some of 'em didn't believe it was true."

"Ah—many a true word is spoken in jest," said Mrs. Tallis oracularly.

"Right you are. That's just what I mean to, one of these fine days. An heiress for my money—Self and Co. for an heiress's money, I should say. I'm sorry you're not an heiress, Miss Barnes, or I'd get your aunt to turn her back for just half a minute, and then pop would go the question and we'd be off to Gretna Green."

"Thank you," said Milly. "I was never glad that I'm not an heiress till now. When I go to Gretna Green"—

"Gracious me, Milly," said Mrs. Tallis, "the young ladies at Miss Baxter's don't talk about Gretna Green, I'm sure."

"Don't they, aunt! That's nothing at all. You should only hear us—when Miss Baxter's out of the way. Why, they call me the mouse, because I only talk eighteen to the dozen, and all the other girls talk nineteen."

Humble as were these attempts at badinage, they were brilliant for Eastingtonshire; and, in any case, they belonged to a language of which the solitary student knew not the alphabet. All the talk he had ever heard was sadly serious, even when—or rather especially when—it related to nothing more important than a mug of beer. He did not wish to sit by as a conversational cypher in the presence of Milly and Mr. Adams, so he seized his opportunity, though a little tardily, and struck in—

"I think marrying for money is detestable."

Even such a common-place as this was not to be looked for from a Winbury hurdle-maker. Mr. Adams winked, as if he had

heard something very comical indeed, and meant to say, "Now you shall see some good fun—I'm going to draw out this young man."

"Quite right, Mr. — I didn't quite catch the name?"

"Herrick, my name is."

"Quite right, Mr. Herrick. I quite agree with you. You don't mean to say you found out all that for yourself? Why, the great What's-his-name himself couldn't have put it better. There's a deep question that has puzzled me for a long time, and p'rhaps, as you think so deep, you can explain. I'm an article to Mr. Smith, of Eastington, you must know, the owner of this very house and grounds. Now I'm a well behaved, modest, moral young man; but some of the other clerks, I am sorry to say, are not at all what their widowed mothers would wish them to be. Now, I put it to you, what is your deliberate opinion of the effect of evil communications upon good manners?"

It was the old story : the man of books was nobody before one whom he felt to be a fool, but who impressed him as a man of the world. Pomatum is power.

Abel, as Mr. Adams had anticipated, was unprovided with a retort ; but Milly, instead of paying the tribute of a laugh to his wit, said quietly, and as if no joke had been intended—

“Bad manners are better than none. You’re quite right, Abel—marrying for money is detestable ; and I don’t see any fun in laughing at what’s true, only because it’s old.”

“All right, Miss Barnes—all right,” said Mr. Adams, with undisturbed equanimity. “If Mr. Herrick can’t take a joke I’ll be as serious as an undertaker. Lucky fellow, to find a champion of the light-weights in Miss Barnes. Let us be sorrowful—what’s life but a vale of tears?—Have you heard of the missing woman, ma’am? Terrible business—they can’t find her anywhere.”

"No!" said Mrs. Tallis, waking up. "A missing woman? Who—where? At Winbury?"

"No, ma'am—in the *Mercury*. They've had a poet down special to put the advertisement into rhyme—a first-rate dodge that, to catch people's eyes. I'll read it to you."

And the wit of Mr. Smith's office, drawing a newspaper from his pocket, began to spout theatrically :—

Say, Cynthia, where art thou to seek ?

Say, Cynthia, where to find ?

I've asked of books——

Abel heard no more. His blood rushed and boiled with angry shame, and, overturning his chair and breaking another tea-cup, he left the room. So this was poetic fame—to be turned into ridicule by any ignorant clerk who wanted an ill-natured joke, and took the first verses that came to hand. The unfortunate poet despised himself, hated his own poem, and, as for Milly—that was all over now ; he could not, after his disgrace,

look her in the face again. No doubt, he thought, this cur of an Adams had somehow found out who was the author, and was taking his revenge for a spoiled jest by laughing with Milly over the lines. It was true that Milly had taken his part before, but that only made his present downfall the more bitter to bear.

CHAPTER IV.

The Swallow shakes his wings,
And the Nightingale she sings,
And the Skylark up he springs,
And the brown Bee hums :
And the owlet echoes, "Why
With the others should not I
Sing, and up to heaven fly
When the Spring-time comes?"

NEXT morning Abel Herrick was ill of the first wound felt by his self-esteem. He had not known that he had such a thing as pride about him until he felt the wound, just as healthy men know not they have digestive organs till they get out of order. His princess had turned into Miss Milly Barnes, his romance into a joke, and him-

self, the poet, into a thatcher and hurdle-maker. A cloud had covered the world because a lawyer's clerk had made fun of Poet's Corner.

But dreaming is a habit not so easily broken. Out of the ruins of his castle he built just one more last cottage in the air. He fancied himself alone with Mr. Adams, both stripped to the shirt, and with none but nymphs and fauns by to see which was the better man. Or, better still, both on horseback and in mail, with visors down and lances in rest, and Milly Barnes in a balcony to judge the prize. Down, of course, would go the clerk before the peasant's strong arm, and his snub-face would smile no more. Milly would hand the laurel wreath to the victor, and he would dash it back in her face. He dreamed and breathed impotent revenge; he would have given twenty years of his life for leave to slap the clerk's smirk face or pull his impertinent nose before all Eastingtonshire and Winbury.

He was in this amiable mood when a more substantial shadow fell between the door of the shed where he was pretending to work, and the sun, who shone on regardless of even a poet's frown.

"Good morning, Abel," said Milly, softly and cheerfully, for the shadow was hers.

"Good morning, Miss Barnes," said Abel, crossly, and without looking up. If she was to be Miss Barnes, let her be.

"Aunt sent me to see if you had been taken ill, and if you were better. No, she didn't—I came to see, without being told. Are you?"

"I am quite well, thank you."

"And that wasn't exactly it, either. I came to beg your pardon. Mr. Adams behaved like what he is—a very foolish young man who thinks himself a very clever one—but I'm afraid you thought it was all our fault because we were civil to him. He came on business about the house, and aunt took the chance of getting me driven over. You

oughtn't to be so touchy, Abel. Why did you run away because you were laughed at by a man like him? A real man ought to be able to hold his own."

Milly, if not the Phoenix that Abel had been going to paint her, had not only a sweet but an honest voice, and her blame felt as bracing as sunshine. Abel would have been more sullen than a bear had he been able to find a cross thought for her after her first word. He was touched by her frankness and brave outspokenness, as men mostly are by qualities they would like to be their own, especially if such qualities are not their own.

This, by the way, is not intended to explain why frankness and brave outspokenness are popular in fiction.

"I did not run away," said the scholar-knight, thus put on his mettle. "I"—he longed to torture himself by learning what had been said of the poem behind his back, and did not know how to fish for it. Of course the opinion of Mr. Adams, being a

hostile and malicious critic, was nothing—that is to say, the favourite food of a self-torturer.

“It was very like a flight, though, all the same,” said Milly with a smile, in which it was impossible even for him to read the contempt he feared. “But Mr. Adams is an aggravating young man, I own, to anybody who minds him. That’s just what he tries to be. You ought to have stayed—he’s very good-natured, really, and he reads poetry charmingly. Didn’t you see how he was leading up to reading those lines from the paper? I knew he had made up his mind to show off when he made a fuss about putting it in his pocket before we left Eastington. He always comes to our school parties, and always reads. He’s very much admired by some of the girls, though some of us laugh at him shamefully, and I’m afraid I’m one of them.”

“What!” said Abel, thrown out of his sullen reserve. “Then he read the verses

because he liked them? He didn't know whom they were by?"

"I don't know about that—I expect he read them to show how well he could read. He didn't say who they were by; why do you want to know?"

"What did *you* think of them?"

"I thought they were beautiful. I always like poetry when it's read for one, and isn't in blank verse, and isn't about people's reflections, and has a sort of a story in it, and is over as soon as it's begun."

The word "beautiful" deafened him to all that followed it. The cloud rolled away—he had tasted fame—and he said proudly, and with the calm dignity befitting the announcement—

"They are mine."

Milly looked at him wonderingly. Now she thought of it, his speech—at least his choice of words—was more like that to which her ears had grown accustomed at Eastington than the homely dialect and limited

vocabulary of Winbury. Without reasoning, she felt that the Winbury hurdle-maker who had gained admiration from an Eastington lawyer's clerk could be no common man. Of the long years of thought and study necessary to enable one of the Herrick family to achieve two or three stanzas that would parse, rhyme, and scan she could not be expected to form any idea. It looked to her like the unknown thing that she had heard of as "genius"; being only a pupil of Miss Baxter in the art of criticism, she supposed that all poetry stood on the same level in point of value; and never having seen a poet in her life, was awed. I fear it must be owned that Milly, though anything but a stupid girl, would have classed the author of the cracker mottoes and Shakespeare himself together as poets, and have been unable to appreciate any fine-drawn critical distinctions between the two. But this did not prevent her from sharing the impressment wherewith the announcement "He is a poet," would have been re-

ceived by Miss Baxter's young ladies. Abel Herrick had published a poem : the Laureate could do no more.

“Why—why, how did you ever learn?”

“One does not learn to be a poet. One is born.” He instinctively felt that some straw or other had turned the tables, and that she was beginning to look up to him. He was getting ready to fall over head and ears in love a second time.

“And—who is Cynthia? It isn't a real name, I suppose? And have you really felt all you say in the lines?”

“I don't know—it's impossible to tell how the inspiration comes. You see, I never saw a hill or saw the sea in my life: and yet they come into my poetry as straight as if I saw such things every day. They must come from somewhere, but from where? I believe in inspiration—direct from the stars. And about my feeling what I write—I never felt any of it about any real woman—unless—unless indeed—I somehow fancied that

I should see you again one of these days."

This was a bold and sudden speech for a shy man; but he was shy no more, except with the shyness that looks like the consciousness of superiority. It is unfortunate that, for once, truth did not go with courage, for the truth was that he had not until yesterday fancied or thought anything about his playfellow since he broke the tea-cup. Now, however, things were changed; and, with his growing faculty of believing whatever he wished to believe, this well-trained dreamer did not tell a conscious lie when he told himself that Milly, who thought his poetry beautiful and Mr. Adams a foolish young man, had been his queen of dreamland ever since she was a child in pinafores.

Winbury being what it was, it was inevitable that the only two human beings in it who could converse with one another should meet frequently, even though he was only young Abel Herrick, the hurdle-maker, while she

was Miss Barnes, an ex-pupil of Miss Baxter at Eastington, and niece of a tradesman's widow. Mrs. Tallis thought no harm of conversations carried on in her own domain of the Manor House, for the thought that her Milly would ever marry beneath herself was too monstrous a notion to be feared. For the rest, Abel went up in her estimation. His strange devotion to the book-shelves appeared to be something different from an unaccountable craze, now that Milly, with all Miss Baxter's polish fresh upon her, proclaimed it wonderful. After hearing what Milly had to say on the matter, she agreed with her niece that hurdle-making was not a suitable career for a genius; and, before long, a very natural circumstance seemed to show her a way in which Abel's prodigious learning might be made profitable.

Meanwhile the days passed on with Abel himself in a monotony of uneventful excitement. How they passed with Milly is a matter with which we have nothing to do:

we are seeing her for the present as Abel saw her, and no stretch of privilege will allow us to see her with two pairs of eyes at one and the same time. By-and-by she may take her turn. In these dream-days, however, she is a muse, with a poet for her worshipper. She is sublime in moral grandeur and mental glory—and a woman besides. Not even Abel could dream away that indisputable fact; and, as the days passed on, the fact became a substantial part of the dream. Before he was aware of it, the poet began to dream of marriage with his muse, after the manner of the mere men and women of Winbury. But alas, a real poet might marry a real muse more easily than a hurdle-maker might win the hand of the carpenter's daughter who condescended to be his friend. It was not that Milly made him keep his distance, or that he despaired of winning her—on the contrary, he felt that she looked up to him. But he was poor, and there was Mrs. Tallis in the way, and he sighed to think how much easier is poetry than plain prose.

How long this state of things would have gone on in a place where the smallest event was almost a miracle is beyond the reach of speculation. But one day—indeed every day, for that matter—Milly was sitting over some needlework at a window which, as it had a view of a sheepfold in a turnip field, gave her a more lively and varied interest than could be obtained from any other point of view. Winbury was certainly admirably adapted for a prosperous courtship. The Beast himself might have wooed Beauty there without the faintest fear of rivalry or of having her interest withdrawn from him: his attentions, however clumsy, would be the only, and therefore an always welcome, break in the monotony of her days. She must think and dream either of him or of nothing at all. We have waived the right to look into Milly's mind; but we may be sure that while her eyes wandered to and fro between her needle and the sheep, the genius by whom her girl's heart was honoured—or flattered: it matters

not which—was not far away. Though he was but old Herrick's foster-son, he was better than any man in all Eastington : cleverer, handsomer, stronger, and—now that his shyness had worn off—a better if less brilliant talker : he talked serious sentiment, which most girls, in their hearts, prefer to wit or humour : he was a poet, a genius, one who believed in himself and must assuredly become a great man. And then he was beyond the slightest question over head and ears in love with her—in itself a virtue of virtues to the now full-fledged young lady from Miss Baxter's, eager for all the experiences of young ladyhood and ready to welcome the first that came. Save that he was neither a peer of the realm nor a captain of dragoons, Abel Herrick had all the personal qualities that go to make up a school-girl's hero.

It was now she who coloured, ever so little, when after these many days he came to her side as she sat at the window of the empty

drawing-room in which he had once hunted for her and found himself—the Abel Herrick that he had become through looking for a child in a tea-cup. But he was not thinking of these things: his rather heavy brow was far too gloomy to be thinking of anything but the present, and that in no pleasant way.

“Milly,” he began without preface, “I have just been talking to your aunt. She has been advising me.”

“What about? Fancy aunt advising you!”

“She means it well, I suppose. But it can’t be done, all the same.”

“What is it? Do you want me to advise you too?”

“Yes—that is—but I know what your advice will be. You know old Crook has drunk himself at last into Westcote Union? So what do you think your aunt proposes? that I should ask for the place—that I should be the schoolmaster.”

“That would be splendid! And of course asking would be having with you.”

"I don't know about that. The people who put in old Crook are not very likely to know good from bad, I should say. And people don't like to have their betters under them. But it doesn't matter. I shan't ask them."

"What!—wouldn't it be a great step for you?"

"That's just it, Milly. Heaven knows I want to climb high, and so I won't take a step down. I must be what I am. I am a scholar and a poet: I don't want to be known as the village schoolmaster."

Milly looked puzzled. "I don't understand, Abel. Your having to work with your hands doesn't keep you from being what you are—why should having to work with your head? Being a schoolmaster's almost like being a clergyman: and anyhow people—I don't mean me—would think more of you"——

"Not they. For a working man like me to be what I am shows genius—but the higher I go by paltry little steps the less I should be

thought of. Nobody thinks anything of a schoolmaster for being a scholar. I should sell my birthright of fame for twenty pounds a year. I must make one bound into glory, Milly, or do what's next best—wait at the bottom, and be famous after I die. There's nothing between."

"Of course you know best. But still—you say the schoolmaster gets twenty pounds a year?"

"And the cottage to live in, if you think it's worth while to set out all the wonderful things I shall find on the shelf to console me for having stuck myself there."

"Oh, I didn't mean that—of course one oughtn't to think of money"—

"Your aunt does, though. She seems to measure the worth of everything by what it will fetch—but I suppose that's the way of some people. It's miserable to feel that there's anybody in the world who would think twenty times as well of me if I had twenty pounds a year—but I won't degrade myself

by giving way to such sordid views, nor should you."

"Indeed I don't, Abel—I only want *everybody* to think their best of you"—

"I don't, then. I want to be believed in for myself. If it was less money with nothing to do for it, I'd take it—perhaps—because it would set me free to finish my great poem without having to waste my days over work that any common farm-labourer in Winbury could do better than I. But to be a school-master would be the end of me—yes, if it brought me in forty pounds a day."

"The end of you?"

"Haven't I told you how? Till I knew you I lived in a dream—I was content to plod on. But I am awake now," said the dreamer in his sleep. "You have taught me what ambition means—and it is not the dream that they say."

"I, Abel?"

"You. Nothing will content me till I am one of the great poets of the world—the

greatest of them all. I have already mastered all learning: it is time to show the world what is in me. My poem in the *Mercury* was a step, if you please; but to be a schoolmaster—like old Crook! My epic wants all my time and strength—am I to waste both on dunces? What matters it how I live so long as my mind is free? It would be better to beg in the road. A schoolmaster! Nothing is a step that does not bring me nearer to you.”

“To me? I’m afraid that wouldn’t be very far.”

“Don’t you understand yet, Milly? I am a labourer—a foundling picked up in the road, whom even your aunt holds to be miles beneath her. I may be the son of the greatest in the land, and something tells me that it is more than a may-be—how else should I be so different from all other men? Even when I was a child the other children treated me as if they were no companions for me. But what then? If I were a king’s son I should

scorn to wear a crown not made with my own hands. But even as a peasant I scorn anything short of a crown. All or nothing—that is my motto, Milly! I will not cheat the world by wasting the time due to my epic in teaching babies how to spell—for twenty pounds a year. I must become great—I have told you what has made me what I am—and then, I may tell you what has made me what I *shall* be.”

Milly did not even smile at this heroic tirade. Nor did she trace in his balanced sentences the effect of book-language assimilated by a long course of self-conscious soliloquies. To her, it was spontaneous eloquence worthy of the crack preacher of Eastington. And, since his whole heart was in his words, it was eloquence in a way. Abel had gone the right way to win a woman's ear; he had blown his own trumpet with all the force of his lungs, and had given her to understand that he was blowing it for her.

What would her school-fellows have thought to hear her courted after this fashion! How they would have envied her—with what jealous gossip they would have flattered her—Mr. Adams himself would cease to hold the apple of discord. It was like a scene in a novel—but common-sense stepped in, and she sighed. She was her aunt's niece, after all; and something whispered in her ear that a man who scorns a bird in the hand generally wants a great deal of waiting for, however great his genius for catching birds in the bush may be.

Abel read her eyes in his own way; and the dreamer felt more like a real man of flesh and blood than he had ever felt before. He was drawn towards her by the sigh that, meaning little, seemed for that very reason to signify a thousand things. He felt, truly and in his heart, that while he had become what he was for his own sake he must show the world what he had become for hers. If hope could only be changed into certainty, felt the

dreamer after the if-loving manner of his kind, there was nothing he had not the strength to do. "It must be all or nothing—and it shall be all!" he thought to himself; and he said, as simply as if it were the natural and spontaneous expression of the thought—

"Will you be my wife, when I am a great man?"

How is it possible to contrast strongly enough what we do with what we think we do? Abel Herrick believed that he had laid one of the elect souls of the Universe before the feet of its Queen—while, in sober truth, a young man had made a young girl her first offer, and that was all. Milly, startled by such abruptness, could only let her work fall from her hands, and exclaim—

"Oh, what on earth *would* aunt say if she heard?"

"Never mind what she'd say, Milly. What do *you* say?"

"Oh, I wish you hadn't asked me—no, I

don't mean that, for I'm glad—but how—when this happens people can't ever be friends again."

"I don't want to be friends. I want you to promise to marry me"—

Whenever he had imagined this scene beforehand, he had seen himself wooing Milly in the style and language of chivalry, pouring out his passion to her in strong and glowing words while she was half drawn to him by the tenderness of her own heart, half conquered by the storm of his own. And now, in the most heterodox way conceivable, he had made simply a plain offer of marriage, without having even mentioned the word "love," and as apparently the result of a discussion about a place and a salary. The purblind young man, for all his poetic learning, did not recognise that it was because for once he had felt the thing called love, and therefore had no need to name the word.

But Milly had just received her first offer; which means, she had translated his words

into finer eloquence than could have belonged to any possible words.

“Will you promise me that?” he went on, more eagerly, but a little more anxiously, for he had wandered into an unknown country, and her silence was hard to read. “Can you see how much I love you?”

“I must tell aunt, Abel. She has been a mother to me ever since I was born.”

“Do you love me, Milly?—I don’t want to marry your aunt—I want to marry you. I only want you to promise—I know I can’t marry you as I am”——

“I wish—I wish you hadn’t asked just now—why didn’t you wait”——

“Wait—till I became great? Milly—would you have me wait till it is too late to say we belonged to one another when we were humble and poor? I swear to you I cannot and will not become great except by you and for you. If you won’t promise now—I’ll”——

“Abel! Surely such a little while”——

"I'll burn every line of my poem, and go for a soldier."

"Don't say things like that—don't frighten me. If you could only speak to aunt"—

"Why should she know till I can claim you?"

"Because she must. I wouldn't do anything without her. And only to speak to her—it would be so easy, if you only were"—

"Not a hurdle-maker. I know."

"You know what she thinks about such things"—

"Milly! You mean to say your promise depends on her, who knows as much about love and ambition as—surely if we love one another nothing ought to come between us two."

"She has loved me ever since I was born, Abel, and I've loved her."

"And I've loved you ever since the world began. If she allows, then will you promise me?"

"Indeed you must ask her before you ask me."

"And that you say is not for a hurdle-maker to dare."

They seemed stopped by a stiffer fence than Abel had ever made. But at last, said Milly, shyly—for how could she fancy herself cleverer than a man of genius?—

"Abel—perhaps she meant more than she said when she talked about your getting made schoolmaster."

She blushed deeply. The woman was doing what the man should have done—suggesting the means by which the difficulties of winning her might be overcome.

But there was much in what she said. No doubt Mrs. Tallis ought to have seen, even with her dim spectacles, which way things were going. And, if so, what more natural sign of her approval could she give than doing her best to put her future nephew-in-law in a position to ask for her niece without obliging her dignity to say No?

"Ah — the schoolmastership! — It goes against me—I despise making my place ask for you. But if that is the only way to gain your promise—I'll show you I think more of your love than you do of my fame"——

"Abel!"

"And I shall be refused, you will see. Never mind—I will go to the Vicar this very day. I will sacrifice everything for you."

"If you only knew how I want you to be everything you can wish for! I *do* want you to get the schoolmastership—and if it's beneath you, you'll soon be above it, never fear."

"Mind, Milly—you know why I am going to ask—that it's for you"——

"I shall remember," she said. And so—hardly knowing how—Abel and Milly, without any needless formal promise, found themselves engaged.

And now a new and inconsistent fear seized upon Abel. What if he should really be refused the offer that he scorned? For the

first time he realised that the piece of pulpit furniture called the Vicar was a very formidable piece of humanity. So diligent a student of occult mysteries could not fail to be tainted with superstition; and the fate of the schoolmastership had now assumed the importance of an oracle. His future glory depended upon Milly, Milly upon the favour of Mrs. Tallis, the favour of Mrs. Tallis upon the schoolmastership, and the schoolmastership upon the Vicar—that invisible being who exercised over Winbury the awe inspired by the unknown.

Scarcely Milly herself was worth purchasing at the price of a visit to the vicarage; and Abel was in this respect worse off than the other villagers. The Vicar's servants and he were not on gossiping terms; and he could not condescend to ask them what steps he ought to take or how he should behave. But there was no help for it. The thing must be faced. Dressing himself in his Sunday jacket, Abel walked up and down in front of the

vicarage windows half a dozen times before he ventured to ring at the bell.

"Law, Master Herrick!" said the village girl who opened the door. "Why, whatever be you come for? And so smart and all—be you come to ax the master to marry you?"

"Is he in?"

"In? Of course he be in, when 't isn't church time."

"I want to see him—on important business, please."

"What is it, Master Herrick? Come, I know you'll tell me. You won't? Then I've a great good mind to take in ne'er a word."

Abel was in no humour for a flirtation at the vicarage door; and the consequence was that the girl, a long-dethroned Phillis, turned cross, almost pushed him into the Vicar's study without warning, and then waited outside the door to enjoy the short work her master would make of the intruder.

"Who are you?" called out a shrill voice, close to the fireplace.

Abel found himself in the presence of the oracle—a little old man with a bald head and shrivelled face, almost buried in a large arm-chair and reading a newspaper. The room was shabbily furnished, but it contained a tall bookshelf; and the familiar sight of his friends and companions gave him courage.

“I’m Abel Herrick, sir.”

“Able Harry? What do you want?”

“The school”——

“The fool? Speak up—what fool?”

“School, sir,” shouted Abel, remembering the Vicar’s infirmity. “The school is vacant, sir, so I thought I might venture to ask to be schoolmaster.”

“Eh? Old Crook—a nice dish for the Whigs he was, eh, eh, eh! Where do you come from? Some fine training college, I’ll be bound.”

Abel’s hopes fell.

“I only learned of Mr. Crook, sir. But I’ve”——

“What—what? One of old Crook’s boys?

If old Crook was a dish for the Whigs, what'll one of old Crook's boys be? You're schoolmaster, able Harry, you're schoolmaster—take the place—take old Crook's cane, and use it well.”

This was all Abel Herrick's warrant; but it was held sufficient in Winbury.

CHAPTER V.

And the Falcon, from his poise
Sweeping downward for his joys,
Without hurry, without noise,
Struck his quarry down :
And the Dove, with envious coo,
Sighed "I would that I were you !
That my soft white feathers too
Wore a bleeding crown."

L O N D O N !

It is a free, wholesome, full-blooded word after Winbury—an open chorus, after a feeble solo in a minor key. It is true the voices of chorus singers are not, as a rule, of first-rate power : but, blended together, their individual harshnesses and dissonances melt more naturally into full harmony than any two or three of their best voices together

could do. Even so the chorus of a great city is made up of the weakest weaknesses and the most sinful sins and the most vulgar vulgarities: but the whole is an organ burst to a penny whistle, as the sweep of the south-west wind to a draught through a key-hole. Whatever it may be to the reader, to the biographer of Abel Herrick the word "London" is a sigh of relief on emerging from a narrow forcing-house into an open field—the sigh that runs audibly round a concert room when some thin minor solo is over, and the full major chorus comes.

In a certain fine new house in a new and fashionable far western region, that is to say in Number Forty-one, Arlington Gardens, W., was one of the pleasantest little rooms wherein anybody could care to spend her hours of rest from the hard work of social pleasure. Be your taste in rooms what it may, rising from the ancient simplicity of a bowl of flowers and a canary to high art in

the shape of plates and dishes strung from the cornice—prefer the pronounced gaudiness of our barbarous forefathers or the more attractive hues of mouldy olives, used-up tea-leaves, or blue-pill that satisfy our more advanced eyes—nevertheless that room shall please your taste, and you shall not be able to say why. It is useless to enter into details, for the little touches that give the room its peculiar charm are seldom the same. It is only when the room contains its living ornaments that the nature of its charm is revealed.

No prettier pair of sisters could well be found, at any rate in Arlington Gardens, than the two girls who, one bright forenoon not many winters ago, were sitting together in that same sunny room. Each sat at a separate *escritoire*, writing silently and busily, one upon a large sheet of thin paper, the other upon pieces of card-board. They were more alike, independently of family likeness, than even sisters often are: and yet nobody could

fail, after seeing them once together, to distinguish them in his mind for ever after. She who wrote upon the pieces of card may be taken as the type of their sisterly resemblance. She was exactly half way between blonde and brunette, and might pass for either dark or fair. She was well-grown and of middle height, slender and graceful. Her face was not striking, but not common-place. Eyebrows, only very slightly arched, were delicately marked over brown eyes : her complexion was fresh and clear, her mouth neither large nor small, but exactly what a pretty and amiable English girl's should be, her face a pure oval, her features just irregular enough to be attractive, and no more. Pretty girls are not meant to be described in detail. Prettiness in a girl is what bouquet is in wine—and who ever thought of trying to describe bouquet ?

She who wrote upon the sheet of paper was of the same pleasant pattern, but more accented in form and colour. She was a little

darker, a very little taller, equally slight, and perhaps a little more graceful, if anybody could be found to make a comparison so odious. Her brows were straighter and rather more strongly marked, her complexion more brightly coloured, and her features more pronounced—the only difference from her sister in the reverse direction being that her eyes were less dark, and of a bright transition tint between brown and very dark grey. Thus her face possessed more character — she would be called the handsomer of the two. It may be said there are many girls who would answer this description word for word. And so there are—tens of thousands in London alone. But that does not make these two the less worth admiring: it only asserts that there are some tens of thousands of pretty girls in London. What distinguishes one of them from another depends little upon what is seen.

The darker sister was the more absorbed in her occupation, for the fairer did not let her

quick scribbling prevent her having eyes for the sunshine and ears for the bird. It was she, however, who started when the door was thrown open, and a young man burst in without ceremony.

"Tom!—How you startled me! Is that the way to plunge into a room when people are busy?"

"Of course it is. What business have people to be busy on a fine morning like this? Pleasure first—business after. Isn't it, Bee?" he asked, turning to the other sister, who had not even looked up at his coming.

He was a very young man, who had just left off growing tall and had begun to grow broad. One could tell at a glance that he knew how to handle a bat or an oar—somewhere about the middle of the boat, probably—and most men of his age would have thought twice before challenging him to walk, jump, or run. He was a good-looking young fellow too, with some family likeness to the two sisters in his smooth face, but in a fairer

and more florid style, and his voice and bearing were frank and genial, natural, and heartily good-humoured. All was so open about him that even his probable faults were plain to read. Of vanity or conceit there was no trace, but at the same time it was clear that nothing he thought, said, or did could possibly be wrong in his own eyes. He was one who was likely to prove easy-going in smooth water, but masterful and headstrong if he found himself opposed. Happily he did not look likely to do anything very wrong even in other people's eyes: and if he was fated to run among rocks and shoals, his face was not that of one who would go down without a strong fight or emerge from them with shame.

"What is that appeal to my wisdom?" asked she who had been addressed as Bee, with a gracious, but rather tolerant and condescending smile. "There—I may as well wipe my pen now you're come in."

"There, Annie—didn't I say she'd agree

with me? But what makes *you* so busy this fine morning? Of course a Bee is bound to be busy—it is their nature to—but with us poor butterflies”——

“That’s bears and lions, Tom—not bees. And I’m not a butterfly.”

“Is it? But it’s not your nature, Annie how”——

“If you’re only come to make puns—there’s the door: which of course you’ve left open. I *am* busy—very busy indeed.”

“Oh, very—I dare say! Let me see what your morning’s work has been—‘Mr. and Mrs. Deane At Home—Dancing’! My dear girl—you don’t mean to say Miss Beatrice Deane has been condescending to help you in any such frivolity as writing ‘Mr. and Mrs. Deane’ a hundred times—like an imposition? I must see how she’s done it—ten to one she’s put in Mr. and Mrs. Mangnall, and dated the cards on the Greek Kalends. Here you are—I knew it—‘The Angles at the Base of an Isosceles Triangle’—By George, Bee, fancy

the Angles dancing—at home! Mind—I distinctly refuse to put my arm round the waist of a sphere, or take a polygon down to supper.”

“Did you never hear of the love of the triangles?” asked Beatrice good-humouredly, “or of the music of the spheres, or of polite circles, or of square dancing? But you needn’t dance with a polygon if you don’t like—Annie has been particularly careful to ask the Campbells. Does that blush mean that I am revenged?”

“What blush? I suppose I’m blushing for you—the idea of a girl flirting all the morning with a long-legged triangle, and leaving her sister to do all the grind.”

“It’s my doing, Tom,” said Annie. “It’s quite fair. I can’t do what she does, you know, and you said yourself she’s not to be trusted with the cards.”

“All right. We’ve all done a good day’s work now. Shut up shop, both of you, and come for a ride before lunch with me. I’ve ordered the horses round.”

"Really, Tom?" said Annie, her eyes sparkling. "Just wait three seconds while I put on my habit—I won't be half a moment more."

"Three seconds and a half, then—I'll time you. Aren't you coming too, Bee? Come, do, there's a good girl."

"I'm afraid I can't, Tom," said Beatrice, shaking her head, as her sister ran from the room.

"Can't—Humbug. Why?"

"I've got my work to do."

"Work?—you're the most—the most—aggravating young woman I ever knew. You're always swatting, as we used to say at Horchester, as if you were going in for Senior Wrangler. And what for, I'm hanged if I know. You're not half the jolly girl you used to be, Bee. I must put a stop to this; and so run after Annie and put on your things and come with me. Women have no business to be men—and there's one comfort, they can't be if they try. What should you say if

you saw me working a pair of slippers for you?"

"Now look here, seriously, Tom—I don't mind your chaffing me, in fun—but that stale sneering really does hurt me. You know what I think of work and self-culture. I can't be Senior Wrangler, but the thing is to work just as if I could be. If I could be, I shouldn't waste a single hour: and so I oughtn't to waste one now."

"I'm very sorry if I vexed you, Bee—I know what a clever and hard-working girl you are—and I wasn't chaffing or sneering, on my honour. But it's ridiculous, your slaving without why or wherefore, as you do. You've got all your life before you—till you're married—and you grind harder than any honour man would in his last year."

"That's it, Tom. Men work for the reward, and so they do just what they're obliged to, and no more. Women work for work's sake, and so they do all they can."

"That's all humbug, Bee. I'm going to be a reading man, though I don't expect any reward—I only want to do us all credit, and please the governor, and all that; but still I mean to do my best, and the way to do one's best isn't to slave. I've got legs and arms—and so have you, if it's proper to say so to a young woman—and they're meant to be used, and I mean to use 'em. I've done a good day's grind now"—

"You mean you've been smoking a cigar over your books for just one hour: for I happen to know when you finished breakfast, and the cigar is not to be denied. One hour out of twenty-four—and you going in for an examination to-morrow!"

"The day after to-morrow, Bee. And it is a good day's work, too. I own to the cigar, and you don't know how it helps a man. I read as hard as ever I could, and shut off the steam"—

"The smoke, you mean?"

"The steam, the moment I felt my head

wouldn't take in any more. If I'd read twenty hours it would have come to the same thing—only I should have been fagged instead of fresh for the next day. What do you say to that, Miss Beatrice Deane?"

"And I," she said proudly, "have been at work, except just at breakfast—earlier and shorter than yours, Tom—ever since seven, without stopping till now. I shall go on till lunch, and then Signor Fasolla comes: that's only play. Then Herr Von Brillen comes for my German lesson, and then I shall finish up my morning's work, if there's any over, or amuse myself with Italian till the dressing bell rings. And then, when we go up to bed, I always read myself to sleep. That's what I call a day's work—and if it wasn't that Uncle George wants me in the drawing-room of an evening"—

"By Jove, Bee! I should think he did, too. If I was the governor I'd give you a bit of my mind. It's awful. A week of it would kill Hammond, who was the greatest swat

in Horchester. Don't you get awfully tired?"

"Never. That's a regular man's weakness. Women only get tired when they've got nothing to do. When I want a rest I change my work—that's enough for me."

"Don't you get headaches?"

"There's another man's weakness—to mind pain. If my head ever aches, I let it ache itself well. The pain tires before I do."

"By Jove! And they say girls are weaker than men. I never thought that though: there's no man alive that could dance seven or eight miles a night, for weeks together, as the weakest girl can on her head, and think it fun. And what's to be the end of it all?"

"None, I hope. But everybody has her ambition, I suppose."

"And what's yours?"

"You know Mrs. Burnett? I want to be like her."

"And who's she?"

"Don't you know? *The* Mrs. Burnett—

and oh, Tom, she's coming to stay with us at Longworth when we go down."

"One of your strong-minded women, I suppose? I know—tall, scraggy, blue spectacles. What's she done? Thank you for the warning, Bee. Perhaps I shan't go down."

"I won't tell you what she's like, for you'll see. But what's she done? Surely even at Horchester you must have heard of Mrs. Burnett—you *must* have heard of her. What hasn't she done? She's one of the first mathematicians in the world—she's made discoveries in astronomy—she's written some of the most famous books—she corresponds with all the great men in Europe"—

"In one word—she's a blue-stockings."

"If you like. I only want my stockings to be the same colour as hers. And what woman has done, woman may do."

"You'll come a cropper, Bee, one of these days, if you don't take care."

"Mrs. Burnett never came a cropper, if you

mean what I suppose you do. I'm as strong as a horse: and if I wasn't, the harder one works the easier it becomes. It's doing nothing that kills girls, and makes them make fools of themselves."

"By Jove, Bee, I wish you were going up to St. Christopher's instead of me! You'd walk over the course. We'd go up together, and get all the honours between us—you'd be Senior Wrangler, and I should have time to go in for the 'Varsity."

"I wish you had a little ambition, Tom."

"So don't I, if ambition's to spoil all the skittles and beer."

"You're not even excited at the thought of going to Cambridge. If I was a man—oh, when I think of your chances, I wish I *was* a man!"

"So don't I then, again. You're—no, hang compliments. If you were a man you'd take things easy, like a man."

"I'm glad I'm a woman then. You're all afraid of work, you're mercenary, you're lazy,

you're mostly stupid—everything that's not like us, whom you presume to sneer at for not being like you, indeed! First work yourselves. If you don't take care, you'll find yourselves like the hare in the fable."

"And a very pleasant nap she had, I dare say—well worth the glory of beating a dozen tortoises. Ah, here's Annie—so you call that three seconds and a half, do you? I suppose you're in training for the tortoise too? Why, I've had time to smash up Bee about the rights of women and all sorts of things. You may look scornful, Bee, but it's true. Put up your books for this once, there's a good girl, and come for a ride. No?—Well, a pleasant problem to you. Come along, Annie."

Let not the experienced reader leap to the conclusion that, because he happened to be their cousin, Tom was in love, or even fancied himself in love, with the two girls, or with either of them. Would that some venture-some historian, reckless of popularity, might tell a story without a word of love in it, in

order to call attention to the fact that love is not the pivot upon which this getting, spending, feasting, starving world goes round. But till the day when love, the rarest of all the passions, is deposed from his fictitious supremacy, it is necessary to say that Tom had been thrown together with his father's nieces throughout all his school-holidays since he first went to Horchester, and yet remained heart-whole from the eyes—which had never dreamed of wounding him—of both Beatrice and Annie Deane. He carried his heart in his biceps: and if he had coloured a little at the name of a partner, it was only because he was at what is still sometimes the blushing age. The two girls were Mr. Deane's nieces and wards, with moderate incomes of their own charged upon his estate at Longworth under the provisions of his father's marriage settlement for the benefit of the younger children: so it was natural that they should live with their uncle and guardian as daughters of the house, more especially as

they became so in fact, if not in name. Once more let not the reader, however experienced, conclude that any sort of mystery or complication underlies this piece of conveyancing, for, if he does, he will be wrong. It is an explanatory fact—nothing more. Annie was perhaps Tom's favourite, because she was not labelled the family genius, and so was more on a level with his own sympathies: Beatrice was naturally not a favourite with young men, or, for that matter, with old men either. Hence may have not impossibly arisen a little of her scorn for the sex that appreciated her less than her more common-place sister, with whom Tom was now rattling on about the coming dance, about his future life at Cambridge, about Horchester, about horses, about cricket, about rowing, about people—to which all conversation at last must come.

“I suppose when you are at Cambridge you will go over and see Uncle Markham?” said Annie.

"Must I? It will be an awful bore."

"You ought. Uncle George thinks so. The old gentleman, he thinks, oughtn't to be forgotten by all his relations."

"Are you sure that was what the governor said, Annie? Now didn't he say Uncle Markham's getting old—his relations ought to see that they're not quite forgotten?"

"Well, be a good boy, and go over for a week some day. Uncle George would like it, and so should I. I should like to know all about Uncle Markham and his odd ways—so long as I haven't got to go there."

"I'll see about it—I shan't really be in Cambridge till October you know. If I get him to leave me any tin, you shall go halves. I wish Bee had come out with us. It's awful to think of the way she spends her time."

"She likes it—I'd do the same if I could, but I'm afraid she's got my brains as well as her own."

"Who's this Mrs. Burnett, that seems to be her great gun?"

"Oh, has Bee been raving to you about Mrs. Burnett already? A lady that Uncle George got to know at some society—a very wonderful woman, I believe—Bee says so, though I shouldn't have thought so, to talk to her. She's coming down to Longworth—she and her son."

"A son? What sort of a fellow's he? I didn't know blue-stockings had sons."

"He's wonderfully clever too—in music. Not that I ever heard him, for he's always had a sore throat whenever we've met him. Perhaps it will be well when he comes to Longworth. I'm not at all sure he isn't smitten with Bee. He was tremendously attentive to her at the Fitzpatricks'—they sat out two dances."

"He must be something special, I should think, to get on with Bee. I'll examine him critically," said Tom, who naturally felt prejudiced against a young man whom he had never seen and who had been mentioned respectfully by a girl. "And who was attentive to you?"

"Oh—everybody, of course. Bee beats me in flirtation, a long way."

"Everybody's nobody. I say, Annie—Bee will never get beyond flirtation if she goes on in this way."

"She says she doesn't want to."

"And you believe her, of course?"

"Of course I believe her. Why should she want to? Do you think a girl wants to be married as soon as she's born? That's what men think, I suppose: they're all so worth marrying—in their own opinions."

"Annie, Annie! You've learned that parrot-speech from Bee. I see her hand in that as sure as I see yours on the bridle. I can tell you that men know more about girls than girls know about themselves," said the man of the world.

"They needn't know much about girls, to know more about them than girls do," said Annie laughing. "Come—I'm getting hungry—let's have a good quick canter home."

CHAPTER VI.

Clear the course! Ring the bell! Look, they start
from the stand

In a line like the edge of the foam on the sand;
On they race, on they rush, till the thin line has grown
Like the offing—the Favourite's in front and alone!

Hurrah for the winner! hurrah for the black
Who bears not a boy but men's gold on his back;
But, though twenty lengths foremost, yet hold him
not in—
He may yet have to race neck and neck ere he win.

THERE was no mystery about the Deane family. Everything that can be said of them is straightforward and above-board. They had not so much as the little finger joint of a skeleton in any of their well-stocked cupboards. Mr. Deane, Annie's and

Beatrice's Uncle George, was a middle-aged country gentleman, of commercial extraction, who could afford to live up to ample means, and had married for love into one of the oldest families in the north of England. He had not gained a sixpence by his love-match, and could afford the luxury. He was known as an idle, but yet a busy man—a great and active patron of all advanced social movements, a strong believer in the inherent aristocracy of intellect, and yet, with an inconsistency more apparent than real, a still greater upholder of the aristocracy of birth, which he revered, and of land, which he exemplified. He and his enjoyed excellent health and spirits, took life pleasantly each after his or her own fashion, pulled well together, and were fond and proud of one another. Friends, whose intimacy warranted the indulgence of a little ill nature, used to say that all the Deanes' geese were swans—which, being interpreted, meant that the Deanes were a very happy and united family,

and lived together not as accidental relations, but as chosen friends.

Naturally Mr. Deane of Longworth was fondest and proudest of his only son Tom. But not only did he love his nieces, the children of a younger brother who had fallen at Balaklava, like his own daughters, but Mrs. Deane also loved them as her own. Therefore it follows that Mrs. Deane was a good wife, with a large, roomy heart, while Beatrice and Annie must have been amiable girls.

Next morning the family was assembled with unusual punctuality at the breakfast table. It was an occasion of some distinction: for Tom was going to Cambridge to try his mettle in a race for colts—an examination for minor scholarships at St. Christopher's, for which he had entered with the view of advertising himself from the beginning as an intending honour-man. It is true that nobody, except Beatrice, cared much for a trial that, whatever the result might be,

would in no way affect Tom's career; and even Beatrice cared less than she might have done, for the candidate's want of ambition had put her out of sympathy. She would have sat up all night before such a trial: he had gone to bed and slept serenely, after a day of smoke and idleness. Still, it was an event, just as a hurdle-race would have been, though, since Tom was in it, not quite so interesting as a hurdle-race would have been. Beatrice had been labelled brains, Annie beauty, and Tom muscle: and nobody was expected to shine out of his or her proper sphere. If Beatrice had been going up, the family would have been wild.

After a long meal of chatter, the final cup of coffee was swallowed and the hansom was at the door.

"Good-bye, my boy," said his father, a good-humoured, portly man, with that expression of headstrong good nature in which Tom resembled him. "If you find it dull at Cambridge after the examination you had

better go over and see your Uncle Markham." For it had been arranged that, as the house was to be shut up after the "at home," Tom was not to rejoin them till they were settled down in the country. The "at home" itself was of course only an out-of-season affair—a sort of *pour prendre congé*—for the Deanes did not intend to visit London that spring.

"Good-bye, Tom," said his mother, a mild little woman who must have been a beauty in her day. "I shall send for you the very first moment we can."

"Good-bye, Tom," said Beatrice. "They don't let people smoke over examination papers, I've heard. If they did, you'd be first, I'm sure."

"Good-bye, Bee. Ten to one in white gloves—no, in blue stockings—I win a donkey-race. Done."

Tom was just saying "Shoreditch!" in his manliest tone to the cabman, when he felt himself struck on the shoulder by an old slipper.

"Good-bye, Tom — good luck to you!" said Annie, from the hall-door. He shook his fist at her, lighted a cigar, and was gone.

On the platform he met a Horchester man bound on the same errand—no other than that Hammond whom he had casually mentioned to Beatrice as the type of a hard student. Now Hammond, unlike Tom, was a poor and anxious man; success on this occasion meant everything to him; and yet the coming examination was not once mentioned by either, apparently not thought of, during the journey. Horchester prided itself upon serene indifference to all things outside the playing-field. The journey "up," as Cambridge men, in defiance of Bradshaw, choose to style the journey down, was uneventful; for adventures are to the adventurous, as Sidonia has it, and these young men of the time were far too cool-handed and cool-headed to be classed among those whom adventures befall.

Everybody, at first or second-hand, knows Cambridge as it is for a sunny week or two in the month of May. And, as it is for that week, so it is supposed to be, in spirit, for the other fifty-one. It is, then, a University of Unreason; the only oasis in all our toiling England where, save her sister Oxford, life is a constant holiday, the "land in which it seemeth always afternoon." What is the picture commonly conjured up by term-time? A holiday multiplied by a holiday — the world's pantomime. The experienced writers who have painted the social aspects of their Alma Mater have made college life a fearful and wonderful mixture of a vast practical joke and a colossal wine party: the inexperienced as a blending of earthly paradise with Pandemonium. Alas for romance — he who would describe college life as it is must write with a dry pen. Nobody would read his small-beer chronicles, and so they will remain unwritten. Only, for once, let the May-term visitor arrive at Cambridge on a cold, moist,

mid-winter afternoon before term begins, and when the trees are bare. If he does not own that even in Cambridge it is not always May, he must be more determined to see with the eyes of others and less with his own than even travellers usually are.

St. Christopher's, familiarly called St. Kit's, was, and is, a hospitable college. It is small, unimposing, and hidden away among back lanes; but its members claim for it the foremost rank, while the men of other colleges justify the boast by saying, in effect, if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes—if I were not a Trinity or a Queen's or a Downing man, I would be a St. Kit's man. In the exercise of its hospitality it received the several candidates in its empty rooms; and Tom and his companion, after reporting themselves to the Dean, found themselves enjoying for a few days the brevet rank of undergraduate *pro tempore*.

They spent the rest of the afternoon in prowling about among the colleges, each

trying to impress the other with the extent of his local and social knowledge, and then dined in hall, where they met their competitors for the first time. Whatever more stately foundations may do, such was the custom of St. Christopher's: and, on this occasion, a very varied body of hungry men its hospitality called together—at least to eyes accustomed to distinguish the sheep of one fold from the sheep of another by the slight marks visible only to the unerring instinct of a public school man. There were the men of Tom's own Brahmin order from the great public schools—foreigners, indeed, from a Horchester point of view, but still equals: and Tom could tell at a glance whence each hailed. There was the half-caste who had been trained at some unrecognised *soi-disant* college or at home—an inferior, but still entitled to approach equality by his personal merits, if he had them. There was the pariah who bore the brand of being hopelessly outside the great school

world—the stray from some academy or institution or some other place with a fine name that signified “bad form” to Horchester eyes and ears. Lastly, there was the no-caste man upon whom no judgment could be pronounced—the man of special and peculiar antecedents, who had come from some British colony in Australasia, or Normandy, or had spent his boyhood in knocking about the world, or who came from Bonn or Heidelberg and spoke broad Scotch, or who spoke broader Irish and came from nowhere at all. All these, brought together for the first time, behaved after the manner of their kind. The Brahmins kept together in exclusive groups of personal acquaintances, ignoring all outsiders: the half-castes drew together by a law of elective affinity: the pariahs ate and drank in solitary and distrustful silence: the no-castes alone defied etiquette, were impervious to stares and short answers, and though inclined to rival boasting on the subject of their own experiences, would have

made feeding time an amusing half-hour, instead of a gloomy necessity, had they not been held at bay. It may be assumed that each, independently of his caste, had a character of his own, but dinner time is short, and the characters of very young Englishmen are long in opening and shy of display. Tom was not particularly fond of Hammond, but these were the only Horchester men who had come up, and so dined *tête-à-tête* in the midst of the profane herd. When dinner was over—some minutes after the Dean had left the high table, for the guests had not yet learned the art of bolting their food in a short twenty minutes—Tom and Hammond, by way of change, adjourned from one another's society to the society of one another, and went to Tom's rooms for a cigar.

Tom, though distant to strangers when distance was required by the traditions of his order, was far from being so by nature, and to all who had no pretensions to social equality with him he was the essence of

geniality. He had made friends with the Gyp in no time, had learned from him all about everybody and everything in ten minutes, and obtained—the Gyp knew how—the means of spending a comfortable evening.

“I hope you’ll be one of us, sir,” said the Gyp, politely but patronisingly, as became one of the oldest members of the college and one who had looked after the Dean himself when both were young. “You’re the best gentleman of the lot, as I can see. There’s a very odd one as got the rooms above you, sir—the oddest gentleman I ever see.”

“Oh, you’re safe to have me—I’m going to be a St. Kit’s man any way. And who’s the odd man upstairs?”

“I don’t know his name, sir—he seems a lonesome sort of a gentleman—he hasn’t even a pockmanteau to keep him company. I fancy he’s made a bit of a mistake in coming to this college—St. Anthony’s is more his style. You should see his boots, sir! He

wouldn't go into hall, and what do you think he did?"

"What? Ate his boots?"

"Ha, ha, ha! You're a pleasant sort of gentleman, sir, you are. You'll get on capital in St. Christopher's. He offered me sixpence to get him some bread and cheese and to give him the change. I don't expect he's got too many sixpences, I don't—he'll never do for us, sir, not at all."

"You mean you'll do for him?"

"A fly in amber," suggested Hammond, who had not too many sixpences of his own.

"Poor fellow!" thought Tom to himself, who, not being an undergraduate of fiction, did not think that to make a butt of a lad a little rawer than himself the whole duty of a university man. "Fancy dining on bread and cheese! I say, Hammond—shall we have the lonesome gentleman down and give him a glass of wine? He might be fun," he added, thinking it necessary to apologise for good-nature.

"If *you* like"——

"All right. Will you kindly tell the lonesome gentleman upstairs, with our compliments, that Mr. Hammond and I would be glad if he'll come and have a glass of wine, if he's nothing better to do?"

"I hope you know what you're doing," said Hammond, as the Gyp left them with the message. "If he's coming up to St. Kit's in October we may be saddled with a man that we shall have to cut. One can't be too careful whom one knows at starting."

"Humbug. One would never do anything if one thought beforehand. We can cut him, into mince-meat, if he presumes on a glass of wine. There he is, though. Come in!"

It was the lonesome gentleman, no doubt. But he was not altogether what Tom, judging from the Gyp's report, had expected to see. He was a well-made, strongly-built young man of about the middle height, with the

grave, rather stern expression of a hard student on features that, though otherwise common-place, were distinguished by almost classical regularity. His brows were drawn together by a slight frown; his light grey eyes were quick and yet dreamy: a singular combination that could only arise from a watchful and observant nature joined to an acquired habit of thinking about what was not seen. His shoulders were broader than Tom's, and his figure promised greater strength, if less activity. "Cut out for number five!" thought Tom, with critical admiration; "but rather rough style at present, I should say." Altogether he was one who would easily pass unnoticed in a crowd, but, if noticed, would retain attention. There was nothing to denote his station in life but his clothes—a badly fitting suit of black obviously stitched together by an awkward village tailor. His face, of healthily pale complexion, was cleanly shaved, but his thick hair was rough and uncared for: the

boots that had impressed the Gyp might have been on the feet of a ploughman.

"This is my friend Mr. Hammond," said Tom, courteously. "Do you mind introducing yourself? The Gyp didn't know your name."

"I am Abel Herrick," said the visitor, in a hard, rather provincial, but singularly clear and precise tone.

"Sit down, Mr. Herrick, and help yourself. Do you smoke? I think you'll find the cigars in that case pretty fair. What do you think of St. Kit's? Things look jolly enough, so far?"

"Where do you come up from?" asked Hammond, with double politeness, as a preface to getting a rise out of him. "We are from Horchester."

"I am from near Eastington," said Abel, feeling that the town sounded more imposing than the village.

"I suppose that's within a walk?" said Hammond, looking at Abel's boots, which were muddy as well as thick-soled.

"Yes," said Abel. "It's not more than two days' journey."

Tom rather liked his guest's quiet manner, combined as it was with a full chest and broad shoulders. A peasant is never vulgar, and there is a verse, once known to school-boys, about the influence of study upon natural hardness and ferocity. But Abel was not thinking of the question: he was mentally taking the measure of the first two of his competitors that he had yet seen. He could not dare to own even to himself how completely at sea he was, now that he had walked from Winbury into the world. He had never been out of sight of Winbury church, and now he found himself thrown at once into a vision of a city of palaces—for such Cambridge was to him. But he had come to conquer, and these were two of the youthful giants of learning whom he was to overthrow.

"The examination is to-morrow," he said, sipping his wine—the first he had

ever tasted, but doing as he saw the others do.

"Hang the exam," said Hammond. "Sufficient unto the day—don't let's think of to-morrow till to-morrow comes."

Abel stared.

"By all means hang the exam," said Tom. "I've half a mind to cut the whole thing and go somewhere. What do you say, Hammond?"

"I'm afraid I must go in—worse luck. Or there's nothing would give me greater pleasure than to let Mr. Herrick walk over, I assure you. I wonder what he'd buy us out for? Which is your line—classics or mathematics?"

"Both," said Abel. "Everything."

"The deuce it is!" said Hammond, too much interested in the result not to fear that Abel might not be a boaster. Here was the sort of man, he began to think, who comes up from a blacksmith's forge and is ripe for a double first at an age when other men have

not left school. Such things have not been by any means uncommon, and it might be the case now. Though he affected to sneer, it was not without many misgivings that he looked on the muddy boots that told of a two days' walk with bread and cheese at the end : and he set himself to draw out Abel in a more serious way.

"You've read pretty hard, I suppose?"

"All my life. Ever since I can remember. I've never done anything but read."

"I'm afraid that's more than we can say," said Hammond, carelessly, thinking it politic to play the dark horse. "Who coached you?"

"Coached?—Who taught me? Myself."

It was just what Hammond feared. The self-taught is as dangerous to rivals as the self-made man.

"Why here must be a he-Beatrice!" said Tom, looking at the young man with such curiosity as to break the unwritten law that forbids lads of his age to betray the names of

their womankind. "I may as well throw up the sponge—Hammond and Herrick are to be the first two, and it'll be queer if one of the field doesn't beat me. Well, if I'm to be beat, I'm all the more bound to run. Hammond, we haven't anything on the race—an even skiv Herrick's first. Done?"

Hammond did not like the bet. "No—I can't back the field, let alone myself, against a man who goes in for everything. If I do some decent verses I shall do all I expect to. But mathematics! Why I never got farther than rule of three. Did you?"

"Not I," said Tom. "I never got so far."

Abel first felt amazed: then scornfully satisfied. Verses were his forte—had he not been printed in the *Eastington Mercury*: had he not all the poets at his fingers' ends: was he not even now engaged upon the Wars of the Stars? And was it possible that men who had not reached even the simplest step in arithmetic should even dream of competing with him who could follow the stars in their

courses, and who knew all the mysteries of numbers ?

Suddenly his eye fell upon Tom's cigar-case, elaborately ornamented with his coat of arms.

"The servant told me your name was Eliot," said Abel, looking at the blazon with interest. "I see you are an Eliot of Northumberland. It is strange you should bear that name, since it comes to you in the female line. I should have said your name was Deane."

"By Jove! How do you know that ?" asked Tom. "You're right, though—my mother was a Miss Eliot—of Northumberland, as you say—awfully great people. When my grandfather died he didn't like his branch to die out, so he left me all he had on condition I'd take the name and arms. So that's my name in full—Thomas George Markham Deane-Eliot: three Christian names and two surnames—rather too much for one."

"Lucky fellow!" said Hammond. "Then you're independent of your father?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, to write myself Eliot is more honour than tin. But the mater liked it, and so did the governor, for he's a proud old boy, and the Deanes of Longworth are nobodies to what the Eliots of Foxmoor used to be, once upon a time. The Deanes used only to buy and sell cattle, but the Eliots used to steal 'em. But how do you know about me?"

"I was only looking at your tobacco-box," said Abel.

Hammond examined the case. "You must have good eyes, Mr. Herrick. I don't see it there."

"What?" asked Tom. "Can you tell all that from a crest?"

They did not even know heraldry, then. The question was beginning to be, What did they know? With Hammond, What did this fellow not know? It was not likely that he had come to Cambridge to try for an exhibi-

tion on the strength of heraldry ; and if he knew out-of-the-way things he might be presumed to be strong in common things.

“Are you a good hand at verses?” asked Hammond, carelessly.

“I don’t like to boast,” said the poet. “I hope I am not a bad one. But—if you will allow me, Mr. Eliot—I will go to my own room.”

As there was plainly no fun to be got out of a man who was neither a wit himself nor the cause of wit in others, the young men did not press him to stay.

“Look out, old fellow,” said Tom to Hammond when he had gone. “That’s a rum ’un to look at, but I expect you’ll find him a good ’un to go.”

“Let him go,” said Hammond, with carelessness less well assumed than before. “I dare say he wants to win more than I. If I come in a bad third, it’s the most I look for. Good night, Eliot.”

“What—are you off too?”

“Yes—I want to write a letter.”

He went to his rooms, and went in for a final cram ; for Abel had fairly frightened him.

Tom smoked over a shilling novel till it was time to turn in.

Abel did what Hammond said he was going to do—he wrote a letter.

“St. Christopher’s College, Cambridge.

“DEAREST MILLY, — To morrow is the great day—think of me when the clock strikes nine. I arrived here safely, and without touching the money your aunt lent me. All the better, for I shall want every penny here. Success is certain. I have spent the evening with two candidates, young gentlemen from Horchester, which is one of the greatest and oldest schools in England. So of course I can judge the others by them. One of them seemed to know very little, and the other nothing at all—they seemed astonished at the extent of my learning. I had to call upon the Dean of

the College, who seemed interested when he heard that I had educated myself, and said he supposed I meant to try for high honours. So in a very short time I shall send you word that I am a minor scholar of St. Christopher's College, Cambridge, with eighty pounds a year for three years: and in three years!—How wonderful all this seems, dearest Milly—I don't feel as if I was the same being, except when I think of you. I wonder what I shall be when I see you again! It will not be long, you may be sure. What shall I not owe to you?—ambition, success, fame—and love, which is the most glorious of all. Your aunt was right: she would be wrong to allow of your formal engagement to one who is not great enough to claim you, and she will see that with her aid I shall soon have 'made my fortune,' as she calls winning the desire of my whole soul. I wish you could be with me now. I must try to describe to you the place and all about it and the room I am in some time when I can realise it all. I am

writing to you in a glorious dream—I can only realise that I have laid my hand upon the crown you are to wear. You said I should forget you in my greatness? Never—whatever my greatness may be, it would be owed to you. I shall never forget that till I die—nor then. Congratulate me on our first triumph, dearest Milly! Congratulate me on being this long step nearer to you!—Your true lover for ever,

“ABEL.”

His second letter was addressed “The Rev. T. Markham, Winbury, Eastington,” and was as follows :—

“St. Christopher’s College, Cambridge.

“REVEREND SIR,—Being about to become a minor scholar of this college I write to place my resignation in your hands. I left on Sunday, having given notice to the boys not to attend school to-day, and waited till I could write to you for certain, because you do

not like to be troubled with business or personal interviews. I trust you will find no difficulty in obtaining a successor. I heard of my scholarship through the Cambridge intelligence of the *Eastington Mercury*; so I should think if you advertised the vacancy there it might attract notice in the same way. I do not think there is anybody in Winbury who is qualified to succeed me.

“I have the honour to be,

“Reverend sir,

“Yours with respect,

“ABEL HERRICK,

“*Late Schoolmaster.*”

Having finished his correspondence he went to bed. But his own thoughts, fed for the first time with wine, and held from turning into dreams by the never-ending chimes, kept him broad awake until the sun rose upon the eventful day.

CHAPTER VII.

“Deem'st thou because thou hadst for birthday gift
A dull, dead weight that Milo scarce could lift;
Because the gods decreed—how blindly fond!—
To thee rich meads—to me a stagnant pond,
That Art avails not Nature to subdue—
That I, by labour, cannot equal you?
See how I lengthen out my supple thighs:
Behold my lungs expand, my stature rise,
Till half an inch I'm nearer to the skies!
I grow—I mount—I swell—the task is done!”

• • • • •
Unrivalled still, the Bull grazed calmly on.

A BEL, at the sound of a bell, hurried into the hall, not now set out with joints of beef and mutton, but with pens, ink, and paper. This was the most imposing sight he had ever witnessed; it was the beginning of a solemn function, rendered more awful by silence. The hall itself, though he had never seen it, was not unfamiliar to him. In its general

character, and even in its details, it was like one of the many rooms in one of his many castles in the air. He could easily imagine Lords and Ladies on the dais, while men-at-arms were reflected in the black oak tables below. He even recognised the minstrel's gallery over the doorway, where no doubt he, the poet, would have sat in those days ; and the portrait of some Lord Chief Justice or Lord Keeper who had given distinction to St. Christopher's long ago, gorgeous in scarlet and ermine, seemed to fix its eyes steadfastly upon him as if singling him out from the herd. Tom gave him a cheerful nod of recognition from the other side of the hall, by way of good morning ; then the Dean went round and distributed a damp sheet of dry questions to each candidate, and Abel's triumph began.

The humours of an examination, such as they are, are known only to Asmodeus, for it is a pantomime without spectators. But they would be well worth a painter's study, for he would have before him in miniature the whole

gamut that runs down from eager self-confidence through placid indifference to despair, and again up from despair through every grade of anxiety to triumphant serenity. The last was Abel's pitch after the first five minutes. He neither sat staring at his questions, nor chewed his pen, nor scratched his head, nor hurried, but set to work with a master's calm, rather scornful over the ease of a test that must have been chosen for the sake of its difficulty to other men.

Tom was no less cool in a different way. He used to boast, with good reason, of his mathematical ignorance, and cultivated it diligently. He gave up his papers within an hour, and then went back to his rooms. On leaving them to meet Hammond at lunch time he ran against Abel on the staircase.

"Well—you floored the paper, of course?"

"I should think so," said Abel, guessing at the meaning of "to floor." "It was easy enough for a village school-boy."

"I only did three questions, and I expect I

mulled those. You'll have a walk over, Herrick."

"I expect I shall," said Abel.

There is no need to follow the course of the examination to the end. Tom enjoyed himself very well, and soon formed a set among the most congenial of the candidates, with whom he became immensely popular. Abel was not one of the set, nor did he become popular. His oddities and his isolation would have been enough to prevent that, even if it had not become a foregone conclusion that he would obtain the first place as a matter of course, and thus practically reduce the number of open places from three to two. One or two men, who did not like to lose prestige by being beaten, set up examination fever or urgent domestic affairs, and vanished from the field.

But at last the race was over, and the colts dispersed again to their own stables, there to wait the publication of the result of the contest. Tom, however, remained in Cambridge

according to the family arrangement, took lodgings for a few weeks, and let the examination and all belonging to it drift out of his mind. There was plenty of pleasanter matter to take its place. Term was beginning, and old Horchester men were coming up: and among these he enjoyed college life for a time without any of its chapels, lectures, gates, or other burdens. He did not find it by any means dull enough to think himself obliged to go over and see his Uncle Markham—that would keep till October very well. But this pleasant anticipation of his freshman's term ran to the end at last, and one morning he received this short letter from Annie:—

“Longworth.

“DEAR TOM, — Hurrah! The workmen are out of this place at last, and to-morrow march into Arlington Gardens: so we slipped down here yesterday, and found everything charming and delightful. The dear old house

looks quite young again, and Uncle George is just like a child with a new toy till you can see all that's been done. Bee and I have *such* a room of our own—the one you know with that glorious view of the Ridge—I shall sit in it all day long, except when I'm out of doors, which will be all day. Bee grumbles a little about having to leave Signor Fasolla and Herr Von Brillen, and all her masters and mistresses ; but Uncle George has given her a grand piano—given us, he says ; but as it's precious little use to me, the present's rather one-sided—and then she's all on the *qui vive* about Mrs. Burnett, who comes to-day. Captain Burnett is here too, on leave, and as attentive to Bee as ever, in his mooning way, but she does not seem to see it. So we're all as jolly as sand-girls : and the moral is that you're to answer this *by return of post*, by coming down to Longworth by the very first train you can get for love or money. Aunt Ellen, nor Uncle George, nor I, nor Bee will ever forgive you if we don't see you

to-morrow before dinner-time. Indeed, if you don't, you'll have to bivouac in the park, for Uncle George seems bent on having all the world and his wife to see our new old home. There's one of his society people, a Mr. Archer, coming to-morrow, on purpose to talk to the Burnetts; and I expect we shall have nothing but coming and going for weeks to come. If you like to bring down a friend, you may, for what we seem likely to fail in is young men, and the Captain mustn't have it all his own way. I've got all sorts of messages for you, but I've forgotten them all—they all mean, Come down.

“ANNIE.

“P.S.—The Campbells are coming.”

“Not a very lively programme,” thought Tom. “A blue stocking—a man asked to talk shop with her—all right, though: I'm game. I wonder if the governor will be quite so happy about Longworth when the bills come in? I suppose my Lady Campbell

wants to see if Longworth's worth fishing for. I flatter myself I know the world a trifle too well to be taken in by that little game. Well—Flora Campbell isn't a bad sort—and—well, I don't think I'll take a man down. In fact I couldn't very well, as I've only Cambridge to choose from, and term's begun. I'll go and tell Taylor I can't breakfast with him on Thursday, and be off to-morrow by the 9.25."

He was on his way to his friend's rooms in the inner court of St. Christopher's, and was passing between the hall and the buttery, when his eye was caught by a scrap of blue foolscap, prominently screened on a green baize devoted to college notices. It was headed "Examination for Minor Scholarships, Christmas, 18—"; and below he read these names in their order of success:—

HAMMOND.

MACKEY.

DEANE-ELIOT.

"By George! I'm placed after all! Won't

they jump out of their skins at home when they hear! There's one for you, Miss Beatrice; you'd better have taken my bet; and old Hammond's come out where he wanted. Here's kudos for old Horchester! Well rowed, the old school! And if I don't show them what you can do in an eight or eleven, my name's not Tom Eliot, minor-scholar of St. Christopher's. Hurrah! It'll be jolly to go home with such news, and I must telegraph this minute to Horchester."

He was almost running to the railway station, forgetting his dignity in the pleasure he should give them at home, and in the honour he had conferred upon the old school, when he ran against and almost over one who was walking slowly in the opposite direction.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Hulloo, Herrick!" he burst out unthinkingly, "The list's out, and"— He paused suddenly.

"Well?" asked Abel calmly, but a shade paler.

“Hang it all!” thought Tom; “I wish I hadn’t met the fellow. But there’s no good beating about the bush when a tooth’s got to be drawn. Give a wrench and have it over. Hammond—MacKay—Eliot,” he said, in the most matter-of-fact way he could. “Those are the horses this time.”

In the same tone he would, under the same circumstances, have spoken to Hammond, or even to his dearest friend, not from want of feeling, but simply in order to do unto others as he would they should do unto him. To beat delicately about the bush would be to insult a young Englishman by implying that he cared a straw whether he lost or won, or for anything under the sun except a reputation for taking things coolly. He had given Herrick an opportunity of maintaining dignity in defeat by answering in the same tone. It was to his amazement, therefore, that Abel, instead of holding out his hand with a smile and saying “I congratulate you, old fellow,” as any Horchester man would have done, cried out—

“What!”

in a high-pitched voice, almost a shriek, as if he wished all Trumpington Street to hear.

Tom could only stare. The story of the Spartan boy was not wonderful to him, but that any man should let the fox leap from under the decency of his cloak like this was more than wonderful—it was incomprehensible.

“Impossible!” said Abel, eagerly; almost fiercely. “It can’t be. And *you* one of them! Who told you such a thing? Are you laughing at me?”

“Not a bit of it,” said Tom, his heart suddenly hardening against one who took the fortune of war in such seemingly unmanly fashion. “I saw the list myself—you can see it on the screen. I am surprised myself, I own: but it’s not my way to laugh when I win, or to howl when I lose. It can’t be helped—better luck next time.”

He was about to pass on, when Abel lurched like a drunken man, and would have

fallen on the pavement had not Tom caught him by the arm.

“Come, be a man,” he said, with scornful pity. “I dare say it’s hard lines on you; but you’ll be having a crowd—come to my rooms—they’re close by. Don’t faint about the place like a girl, man—if you must give in, do it where you won’t be seen.”

Poor Abel allowed himself to be led to Tom’s lodgings. He seemed to have lost all will of his own. Tom made him sit down, and poured him out a wine-glass of brandy. But it remained untasted. After sitting like a statue for a long minute, he suddenly rose up and began to pace up and down the room like a wild animal who had just been caught and caged.

Tom both despised and hated scenes: but it began to be borne in upon him that failure meant more to Abel than it would have meant to him.

“I can’t have this sort of thing, Herrick. Drink that brandy this instant. You don’t

mean you're making such an outcry over a beggarly eighty pounds? Why, twenty men have lost besides you, and I'll lay anything you're howling for them all."

Abel felt the taunt. He swallowed the brandy, and turned upon Tom savagely.

"Yes—for them all! It seems to be sport for the rest of you, but it's death to me. You haven't set your whole life upon one cast, to win or lose all. You haven't mastered all learning to find yourself thrust aside to let in a lot of idle schoolboys. You can't understand—that scholarship is my right; I have worked for it from before I could read. The loss of it leaves me a pauper, it destroys my career, it shows me that not merit but favour gives men their chances—unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away. A man like me to be put down at the tyranny of an examiner!—it is fear—it is jealousy"——

“What howling rubbish! Who ever heard of an examiner being”——

“Unjust? You haven’t, of course. It can’t be that I have been fairly beaten by you.”

“They’re never unfair up here. Nobody ever heard of such a thing”——

“You are rich, and I am poor.”

“And it’s just the poor men that win. Why the Vice-Chancellor’s father was a common working carpenter, and he’s refused a bishopric.”

“Then there is some terrible mistake—for I tell you it’s impossible that you should win and I lose. You don’t know what my life has been—what I have done”——

“By Jove, though—I know it isn’t likely I should beat you—suppose the papers should have got mixed: such a thing might be, and it’s more likely than that a reading man like you should be licked by an idle dog like me. Just wait here five minutes, Herrick—I’ll see

the Dean—perhaps I've been reckoning without my host after all. By Jove, I shall be almost glad to find myself sold"—

The kind-hearted young fellow caught up his hat and was off like a shot.

The ghost of hope returned to Abel, and made him spend a hideous half hour of suspense in drumming upon the window pane, his forehead damp with cold perspiration while his temples throbbed and burned. Anxiety prevented his realising what the result would be if there was no blunder, and if he was really a beaten man.

At last, after what seemed many endless hours, Tom returned.

"Herrick," he said very gravely, but more kindly than before, "I'm afraid I have bad news—but I'm not sure it mayn't be good in the long run. The Dean is a brick—there's no mistake about that, anyhow. He seemed glad to see me, and said my papers were very fair—barring the mathematics of course; they don't look for that sort of thing from a public

school man. And they might look a long time for it from Horchester. He said there was no possibility of a mistake, and of course, when one comes to think of it, there couldn't be. I didn't say much about that, because going to ask if I hadn't been placed by a blunder would have made me look like a fool, and have been like crying down Horchester—but I asked him about you."

Not being given to make long speeches he paused ; but Abel said not a word.

"He said there could be no mistake about your papers, they were so queer. I can't tell you all he said—only what it all came to. You are a wonderfully clever fellow. You seem to know everything that nobody knows and nothing that everybody knows—except in mathematics, where you were better than most of us, and seemed to have gone farther, unless it was that you'd begun to read them at the wrong end ; but your classics were as if you'd been taught by some awfully clever fellow from Bedlam, you were so original and

so wild. He thought you safe to be a high Wrangler, though, with good training, and he'd have been glad if you'd got one of the scholarships, only, as they have to go by examination, of course to take other things into account wouldn't be fair to the other men. He said he soon gave up looking at your classical papers, except for fun, and tried to give you all the marks in mathematics he could, but it was no use—several men besides MacKay answered what was set better than you, though if you had been examined in what wasn't set he's afraid *you* might have plucked *him*. He says you must have thought you were going to be examined by Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa—whatever they may have been—and have studied in the Middle Ages. He would like to see you awfully and have a talk with you. I told him you had taught yourself, and how important it is for you to get what's after all of precious little use to me. By Jove, Herrick, I feel desperately mean and shabby to win

over a fellow that could have licked me into fits if he'd only been used to exams—the Dean as good as said you ought to have won if you'd only known the commonest things that every fourth-form boy knows by nature. I'd go and call on him straight if I was you."

And much more he reported of what the Dean had said, bringing every scrap of praise into prominence, and smoothing down all severities as well as honesty and want of tact would allow. Little could Tom guess that what he intended for encouragement and consolation was, in truth, a crushing blow.

"No," said Abel, at last, no longer fiercely, but calmly, hopelessly, almost humbly. "You are too good to me. I will not see the Dean. Good-bye."

"Wait a bit—there's no hurry. Where are you off to?"

"No matter. Only this is no place for ignorant fools—like me. I think I will be

a soldier. I shall pass that examination, anyhow."

"That's all humbug. Go and see the Dean."

Abel shook his head sadly. "No."

"It's hard lines," said Tom. "If I was you I'd put on some swell coach and try again. Send Greek to the devil, and your mathematics will pull you through."

"Fine talking—to a man with but twenty shillings in the world; and those I owe."

"Well, that's pluck, and no mistake, to come up to St. Kit's with twenty shillings! I thought a man of your cut must have bottom in him somewhere. It is hard lines, by George! I can't stand robbing a man of his chances without trying to make up for them. You'll excuse my saying I don't think St. Kit's is the place for a man who hasn't got too much tin. But you must get something, somewhere, if it's only a sizarship—that's clear. I never felt so ashamed of myself in my life. I'd give up this con-

founded scholarship if that would put things straight; but it seems I'm not the only man before you. Fancy an exam, that one thinks nothing of, being so uncommonly like a tragedy. I have it—coach, if you can't be coached—make fellows pay you for grinding. There are lots of men, Hammond himself for one, who'll have to cram Euclid and all that muck for the Little-Go, and you could do—look here—I must begin to grind at it before October comes—I know I shan't when I come up—and I always meant to put on a coach between Horchester and St. Kit's—come down to our place, Longworth," Tom ran on, letting his needless scruples about profiting by another's loss and his eagerness to make compensation to a deserving and unfortunate man hurry him beyond the bounds of common sense and common prudence. "Come down to-morrow—they'll be all reading men and women there but me; we'll make a reading party of it while you're turning yourself round. I must have had some tutor if I

hadn't you, and you're the man. The governor's tremendously partial to all queer uncommon people, and we're very free and easy: you'll be quite at home."

What could Abel, with a head too occupied for another thought to find room, say to such an offer? Tom read his silence as the natural hesitation of a shy and sensitive man, and said still more warmly—

"I mean it—I never say what I don't mean. Think it over if you like—I don't start till to-morrow morning, and you can easily make up your mind by then. But you'll come. I've made up my mind you're to be Senior Wrangler and Archbishop of Canterbury; and Tom Eliot isn't the fellow to make up his mind without doing what he's made it up to, as all Horchester knows, and as you'll know before long. Let me have a line before bedtime to say if you'll come to Longworth—just yes or no. When you're once there you'll find there's nobody like the governor for giving a man

good advice, and helping him too. And from the moment you say yes, mind, you're my tutor; and I don't think you'll find the governor a man to quarrel about terms—you know what I mean. I must be off to the telegraph now—don't forget to let me hear."

It is true that Abel Herrick was not likely to interfere with Flora Campbell. But, none the less, there can be little doubt that Tom Eliot had acted less like a man of the world than he believed himself to be. Only because he wished to be just and generous, he had pressed his father's hospitality upon a stranger of whom he knew absolutely nothing worth knowing but that he had not twenty-one shillings in the world. That headstrong look of his was beginning to show that it was not there for nothing. But the deed was done, and he was not one to withdraw. "That's a man who's down, and has to be helped," said he to himself as he lighted his cigar, and went at last to send off his telegram.

Abel dragged himself to his own lodging—a poor back room in a back street, where he had been economising upon triumphant hope and Mrs. Tallis's ten pounds, now all spent but one. That back room had for many days been an antechamber to the temple of Fame—and now! He had wasted the whole of his life—and what life is so long as its first one-and-twenty years?—only to find, on the day appointed for triumph, that any chance school-boy was better armed for the fight than he. Of what the world seemed to recognise as learning he knew nothing: he thought he had been travelling far along the broad high road, and he had only been following a Jack-o'-lantern along a bye-path that led to nowhere at all. His was the depth of mortification in which the vainest of men cries out that he is a fool. He had not the means, even if he had the heart, to begin again. Why had he ever left Winbury, his fool's paradise? There he was great—in a dream. And his

"Wars of the Stars," and his certainty of future glory—how could he let Milly know of this shameful downfall—how her hero, after all his boasting, had failed? How could he go back to the Vicar, and beg to be restored to the schoolmastership he had so confidently resigned? How, even, could he say to Mrs. Tallis, "I have failed—I cannot pay you back your loan"? At one stroke he had lost bread, hope, ambition, pride, self-respect—and "Milly is lost with the rest of it," said the poor young man to himself in his despair. "I can't tell *her* of my disgrace. I should die of shame."

Men have drowned themselves for less. And then he thought of how he had been beaten by his confessed inferiors. He thought of Tom Eliot: and the poor beaten, self-styled genius envied—the word must be used—the lad who had been trained for the race and had gained what should have been a help to poverty because he had been rich enough to be sent to Horchester: in a word,

because he had required no aid. The logic might be good or bad, but it stood in the way of gratitude. Why should the race be denied to the swift and the battle to the strong? Why should the rich be enriched at the expense of the poor? Why should Tom be born to fine linen and Abel to rags when both came naked into the world? Why should the rich be filled with good things and the hungry be sent empty away? With these and like unanswerable questions he was aggravating his own terrible disappointment when his eye fell upon what he had been too self-absorbed to observe—a trunk studded with brass nails in a corner of the room, and, upon a table, a letter directed to himself in the most lady-like Italian hand. He opened it mechanically, and read:—

“MY DEAR ABEL,—When you told me of your success I didn't know what to do for joy! Of *course* you were to win! So now, dear Abel, you can really finish your grand

poem and be a great man. I didn't write before because Mrs. Hodges at the shop finds out what's in all the letters—I know she does—so I send this by the carrier, who will always post my letters for me at Eastington. The box contains all your things, which aunt got together and sends you—which shows she's pleased; and, dear Abel, I *am* so proud! It isn't likely I should forget you indeed—I'm sure there's nobody to make anybody forget anybody, not even young Mr. Adams; he drove over yesterday to tea, and was more absurd than ever; he made me laugh all the evening at his ridiculous jokes, but then I've been in a laughing humour ever since I heard the great news. I told him of your success, of course, and who wrote the poem in the *Mercury*; so I expect they'll put it in all the papers. I'm sorry to say poor Mrs. Herrick has a bad lumbago, but all the others are very well; they are very proud to have brought up such a great man as you are now, and I had to

explain to them what a scholarship means about a hundred times; but as I don't know quite exactly myself, I found it rather hard. However, I did what I'm sure you'll think right. I asked aunt for a sovereign, and gave it them from you, and they understood that very well. The girl at the vicarage told aunt that the Vicar said when he got your letter, 'A good riddance, too; confound the rascal for telling me he was one of old Crook's pupils; he's some training college puppy, I'll be bound, in the pay of the Whigs; drunk or sober I'll have old Crook back again.' But he isn't back, so the boys have a holiday; so you may suppose what you're thought of here by young and old. I asked Mr. Pottinger to have the bells rung, and he would have, only he was afraid of shaking the steeple down. I shan't expect you to write to me often, for you'll have so much to do; but do write when you can—it's but dull now you're gone. The box is corded and the carrier waiting, so a

million congratulations and best love from
your ever affectionate

“MILLY.

“P.S.—I shall make you a purse for your first money, and shall get the silk in Eastington. It will be something to do, for aunt never lets me do anything to help her, except keep your books dusted. I found an old broken tea-cup behind them the other day, and kept the bits for luck—‘Broken pitcher, you’ll be richer; broken cup, good for luck,’ they say. I sit at the drawing-room window most mornings, so you know how to see me, if you care to. Don’t work *too* hard. Mind and *always* tell me *everything* that *ever* happens, for even if you hadn’t got what you wanted, it would have been *all the same* to your affectionate

“MILLY.

“P.P.S.—I *am so* glad, dear Abel!”

This was the last straw—every word was

a sting. He did not seek to trace out the love written in sympathetic ink between the lines of a young girl's letter to one whose greatness made her shy. He could only see that he dared not return to Winbury except to confirm his premature glory: he could not write to Milly to answer her joy by saying, "Love me more than ever, for I have failed." But the sting was wholesome in a way—it nerved him, no longer to ambition, but to climb the ladder slowly since he could not reach it at a bound. Surely not Tom Eliot, but Destiny, had offered him an escape from the dilemma between going back to Winbury like a beaten cur, and throwing himself into the Cam.

So he thus answered Milly's pledge of constancy in good and ill:—

"DEAR MR. ELIOT,—I have decided. I will go to Longworth to-morrow.

"Yours gratefully,

"A. HERRICK."

But he who has dreamed of springing to the top of the ladder at a leap is not content to climb when he wakes, however stoutly he may resolve. Having sent his note to Tom's lodgings by a messenger, he surrendered himself into the hands of fate, and sat down and dreamed bitterly.

CHAPTER VIII.

Grant me, ye gods, a wealth of wit
Without a skull to cover it :
And, free from rust that moulders,
Grant me a blade for ever bright,
A sunless day, a shadeless night,
A fame without beholders :
Yea, grant me all prodigious things—
A flawless leaf, a pair of wings
Without a pair of shoulders.

BUT, dear Mrs. Burnett, how is it possible for *anybody* to be happy but an angel or an oyster? We are born to be happy, we are told, and to be thankful for our blessings. What are mine, I should like to know? I am not rich enough to do any good that would not be done without me, and though the widow's mite did a great

deal of good to the widow, I have no satisfaction in doing things merely to feel that I am good—I want to feel that the world is really better for what I do. I am not poor enough to enter the real battle of life—I am only a holiday soldier, arming myself for a war that goes on all round me and that I am not allowed to see. Ah, I have it! Men *are* made to be happy, which means that women are not, so the saying is true after all.”

“This is the nineteenth century, my dear, and you are in your nineteenth year—the conjunction of a melancholy year with a discontented age. But you have indeed a terrible list of sorrows. I am going on for seventy, and I never had but one that I cannot whistle away.”

“And that—?”

“No, it’s not my son Dick, as it’s on the tip of your tongue to say. It’s just that I shall die without ever having been as sad as you. There’s just nothing that can make

up to a woman for never having been a girl."

Beatrice was helping her heroine dress for dinner at the Deanes' country house at Longworth, which Mr. Deane had rebuilt at a cost only known at present to his architects and builders. As she was not given to hero-worship, it may be assumed that she had not chosen her heroine without cause. It was a real condescension on the part of such a moon of science and star of society to find a corner in her list of occupations for a visit to Longworth, and Beatrice was immensely proud of waiting on her like a maid of honour about a queen.

The great lady was insignificant enough at first sight. She was a little elderly Scotch-woman, with a marked national accent, and with features that could never have been anything but homely. At second sight, however—that is, as soon as she had time to speak—her French vivacity of expression drew attention to fine dark eyes that were

shown off by a profusion of snow-white hair; and then she became interesting. But her principal note of character was her smile, which attracted some, but repelled others, for it was not a kindly smile, and intolerable to those who were afraid of ridicule. When she spoke kindly it seemed to contradict her words, and to throw an atmosphere of hard doubt over the reality of her numberless kind deeds. But, to those who were not afraid of it, it seemed the solitary protest of a bitterness of experience against a sweetness of nature, blended by time into a wise habit of laughing instead of crying over spilled milk and those who spill it—herself included.

In short, she was not only a learned woman and a good woman, but a woman of the world besides; and it was largely owing to this last quality no doubt that Beatrice, like others, felt the influence ascribed to her real mental eminence. The girl who could do nothing by halves tried to turn herself into a new edition of Mrs. Burnett—binding, tricks of phrase,

and all, even to the errata. She was even ashamed of being neither so old nor so little as her lioness, and would willingly, in her enthusiasm, have exchanged her own bright brown hair for the snows of more than sixty years. From which one thing is certain—her hero was yet to come.

Of course one great charm of her model was its flawless consistency. It was a little jar to her, therefore, when Mrs. Burnett, who had advanced so far out of woman's beaten track, as much as told her, who was as yet only struggling through the hedges, that she ought to be happy in the high road.

"But surely you were not content before you had shown what a woman can do—before you became so great—ah, I should be content enough if I dreamed I could ever be half so great as you! But then you were not fastened down into a little circle like me. You were out in the world. There was a place for you."

"My dear! As if the whole round world

was not a little circle, and as if we were not all out in it—and very much out, sometimes. And as to place, there is just one place for all things—and that's wherever they happen to be. Mine is at Longworth now; and are ye sure your place is not there too?"

"Anyhow, there I am."

"No, my dear. Longworth is a bonny nest of trees, and hills, and burns—a place to be young in. And when are ye there? Longworth is not a library—and when are ye not there?"

"And when are you out of the library?" asked Beatrice, as if that settled the whole question.

Mrs. Burnett led her before the cheval glass. "Which is most like a milk-maid," she asked; "I, the old town mouse, who have eaten all my candles at both ends, or you, the young country mousie, who has only begun to nibble at one?"

To that question there was but one answer. The cheeks of Beatrice Deane were already

paler than even a few weeks ago, while those of Mrs. Burnett were firmer and brighter than many an idle girl's.

"Perhaps when I am as old—I mean as young—as you," said Beatrice, gaining colour from a blush, "I shall be able to take work like play. You did not become Mrs. Burnett by running about the fields when you were—old. What woman has done, woman can do."

"I became Mrs. Burnett just by marrying Mr. Burnett, my dear. And what woman has done is the very thing woman can't do—for Nature never yet repeated herself, and never will. I did not run about the fields, and for why? Because I had to spend play-time in making my six little brothers ready for the schoolmaster—and their clothes too—and finding hands for the whole house, for we never had a girl worth the salt to her porridge; and eyes for two—for my father was blind, and that's what made me learn Greek—or ye may be sure I'd not have left a flower

growing on the moor. Ah, my dear," she said, looking up into Beatrice's face with a touch of pity in her eyes, if not in her tone, "I am conceited enough to like being called young, my bonny Bee, but I'd like better to have been young, and a mad-cap lassie with the rest of them. It was not my fault I lost it, but it will be yours if you do. A woman that's never been a girl! It is as bad as a man that's never been a boy; and boys, my dear, are always idle ne'er-do-weels, but those that never turn into men."

"*You* say that!" exclaimed Beatrice, opening her eyes in amaze. "Would you have me copy the girls—and they're the only ones I have to copy—who think of nothing but dress and fritter away their hearts on staircases till they're unfit for the only thing they ever think of?"

"I'm not sure but ye might copy them a little way, and no harm—unless ye'd rather play golf or cricket. You do neither—ah, my dear, it would be just nonsense for me

to pretend I've not done something, but it has been in spite of never having been a girl."

Beatrice's eyes, which had been on the point of filling with tears at what sounded more than half like a scolding from one whose good opinion was her immediate aim in life, lighted up once more. "I can't play cricket," she said. "You are what you are without cricket or waltzing, and whatever way you took is the right one, I'm sure. I wish mine were a home like yours was."

Mrs. Burnett gave her silk flounces a final shake before the cheval glass, and looked at herself not without approval. "Nay, my dear—if you had been in my place you would have soon found your way into the kirk-yard. You may be one girl in ten, but I was one in ten thousand."

Beatrice opened her eyes and doubted her ears. "I never heard you praise yourself before!" she exclaimed, surprised out of

politeness. "I thought you left that to the world."

"My dear, to tell the truth is not vanity. I say that my dinner never disagreed with me since I was born."

"Your dinner!"

"Nor my breakfast—by which I mean breakfast, and not toast and tea. I'm not proud of my brains. That's nothing—everybody, down to my poor boy Dick, has brains nowadays—if he'll not be the exception that proves the rule. But of my teeth and my digestion I'm just as proud as a peacock, for they're things that get rarer every day. I've tried mine with London seasons, night work, meals taken anyhow or no-how, poverty, luxury, sorrow and pain, for nigh seventy years, and they're as good as new. But that I'm not a palsied old woman is just good luck—I ought to be. If you were made of cast iron, I'd say live my life if it pleases you. But as I am an unnatural phenomenon, I say

take care of the flesh and blood and the bright spirits, my dear, and give the brains just a wee chance of taking care of themselves."

"I am as strong as a horse, I assure you!" said Beatrice, eagerly. "And then it is my right to be whatever I can make myself"—

"Your right? My dear, it is only sham people talk of their rights, and never get them: real people don't talk of their duties, and do them. If you think of your duties you'll get your rights fast enough, and if that's never you won't care. There—I'm dressed now, and I only hope you're half as ready for dinner as I am. Come in!"

"Oh, Bee! Oh, Mrs. Burnett!" exclaimed Annie, almost jumping into the room. "Tom's come back—the dog-cart is coming up the avenue. I wonder if he's brought anybody with him?"

"Bring? Who should he bring?" asked Beatrice. "Some coxswain or longstop, I suppose. I don't think we need be very much

interested in wondering who is to be the next specimen of Horchester." She had been sadly put out by finding Mrs. Burnett's views of life so little in accord with her own, and disappointed in not finding sympathy. Every pet belief of hers had been wounded by that curious smile that seemed to point the kindest words with an unintentional sting. And then—if it had not been Mrs. Burnett—it sounded like the theory of the enemy to suggest that a woman's delicate brain is as dependent for its vigour upon animal health as a man's. Men have brain with muscle, women brain without muscle—therefore women are free from the impediments that hinder men. That was how she argued ; and Mrs. Burnett herself was a living proof of the soundness of her logic, however much she might elevate her digestion at the expense of her brain.

"For we, read I," said the old lady. "I still like boys, in spite of my own. Is Dick in the drawing-room yet, Annie? But I need not ask—the wonderful talent the lad has for

being last is real born genius. He was the last born, and the last left me," she said, with just the whisper of a tear in her voice, "the last in his class, the last to see a joke, the last"——

"The last, I think we heard, to leave a certain unpronounceable station," said Annie, "when the Sepoys had to be held off for a minute more. Isn't it true?"

"Thank you, my dear. I'm not saying the lad's not brave, for he's a Stewart on my side: but I never could quite believe the story of his being first in the charge afterwards all the same. Ah, Annie—if the long - stop comes, let down poor Dick easily."

Annie looked slyly at Beatrice: but that young lady's mind was soaring above such sublunary concerns. "And after all—if she is right—I, too, don't know what indigestion means!" she was thinking proudly.

The two girls followed Mrs. Burnett into the drawing-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Deane

and an elderly gentleman in spectacles were waiting for the dinner bell. But before it sounded, another bell clattered through the house: and Annie, clapping her hands, cried out—

“There’s Tom!”

And Tom it proved. In another minute they heard his voice on the stairs, and in he came, followed by the half-expected stranger as far as the door. But the latter, though interesting, would keep. At present all eyes and ears were for Tom.

“Well, you have made a clear sweep of it!” he said, as soon as the shower of greetings had subsided, for the Deanes had no notion of its being good manners to treat one another as strangers, whether strangers were present or no. “I feel like Rip van Winkle—I don’t know my own home. And, what do you think?—wait a minute though—I must introduce you to my friend Herrick, who’s been good enough to—by Jove! it’s such a long story I can’t find the head of it

—my father, my mother, Miss Beatrice Deane, Miss Annie Deane”——

The strange young man, whose eyes looked half dazed with his sudden half entrance into a lighted room, made an awkward bow to the chandelier.

“I am happy to see you at Longworth,” said Mr. Deane, holding out his hand. “Always happy to see any friend of my Tom. An old school-mate, I suppose? My dear, I suppose we shan’t wait much longer now? Tom and his friend must be as hungry as fox-hunters.”

Mrs. Deane, standing by her husband, regarded Tom’s friend, whose name she had not quite caught, with no little curiosity. His boots, in particular, were not of the sort associated in her mind with Tom’s set, and there were other points about the young man that puzzled her. Annie whispered to Beatrice—

“What a disappointment! I told Tom to bring somebody nice, and he has brought an

usher from Horchester. I'm so glad the Campbells have not come—just to spite him."

"He is what Tom would call nice," said Beatrice. "He looks as if he could knock somebody down, and would like to try."

"I'm very glad you've brought Tom home at last," said Mrs. Deane, pleasantly, but a little stiffly, for she had made up her mind that the young man was not to her liking. "I was beginning to think"—

"And now guess my news," interrupted Tom, "all of you. I bet everybody that everybody's wrong."

"You've been to see Uncle Markham!" said Annie. "No—you've been—it's something about an F and a C?"

"Wrong for you! Go on—I'll say who's right when you've all done."

"A bit of news, eh?" said his father. "Let me see—you've not—you've not given up smoking, I suppose? That would be too sensible to be true."

"George!" said Mrs. Deane, "as if he'd tell it in that way!" A sudden surrender of the pipe only suggested one idea to her, and it was uncomfortably connected with the visitor, who, just because he did not look like one of Tom's friends, might turn out to be Tom's future brother-in-law. Her boy had been quite long enough away for mischief, and there was no knowing into what hands he might have fallen. "You've lost all your luggage again!"

"You've made five thousand off your leg-bail, or whatever you call it," said Beatrice with affected disdain. "Let me be the first to congratulate you."

"Wrong—every one of you. I've not been to see Uncle Markham. I've not lost my luggage. I've not made five thousand off whatever I call it. The governor's nearest, for I have given up smoking ever since I left the train; but as I shall most likely take to it again before bed-time, I can't own I've lost, even to him. I am a minor scholar elect of

St. Kit's—what do you say to that, Bee? Wasn't there some bet of blue stockings? I'll let you off for a pair of slippers, if you know how to make them."

"Then let me be the second to congratulate you," said Mrs. Burnett from the fireplace. Tom bowed, not to her reputation, of which he knew nothing, but to her snow-white hair, and was not afraid of her smile.

"Who would have thought it!" said Mr. Deane, proudly. "If it had been Bee, now!—Mrs. Burnett, Dr. Archer, let me present to you my son Tom. Ah, Mrs. Burnett! this sort of thing makes us fathers and mothers feel like an old hen whose ducklings are taking to the water."

"Oh, Tom!" whispered Beatrice, whose ill-temper had cleared off in a moment. "If I wasn't so glad, I should envy you! But it's as good as being examined myself, and coming out before the first; if cleverness has won, what would not work have done!"

"No—cleverness didn't win; nor work

either," said Tom. "They're both standing in the doorway. It was just old Horchester pulled me through, and nothing more. I was a bad third as it was, and ought to have been a fourth, if all had their due."

"And who is it that's in the doorway, please?"

"Ask him for yourself, after dinner—he's quite your style. He's to be Senior Wrangler one of these days."

"No—is it true?"

"I have said it. And what I say"—

"Is nonsense." But she looked at the stranger more heedfully, and was studying the contrast between the ploughman's boots and the scholar's face when at last the welcome thunder of the gong announced the only piece of news that never grows stale.

"Mr. Herrick," said Mrs. Deane, giving her arm to the silent professor, who had been invited to talk to Mrs. Burnett, "will

you take down my niece Annie? But where's Captain Burnett?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" said his mother, "don't wait a minute for Dick! I don't think the lad ever tasted soup in his life, nor fish, but when half cold. I believe he was almost in time for dinner once, but it turned out he had mistaken the day of the week, and thought it was yesterday."

"Never mind," said Mr. Deane. "The hare and the tortoise, you know."

"Ah, those tortoises! How vain they are because a hare once preferred a nap in the sunshine to the shame of beating one of them—and quite right too. But what I complain of poor Dick is that even when he runs with tortoises he comes in at the tail. But mercy on us! Here is Dick himself, before we're down the stairs. Why, Dick! what brings you down so soon? Dinner has not begun."

"All right, mother," said a deep, good-tempered voice from the rear of the proces-

sion as it entered the dining-room. "I'm very sorry to be so nearly late, Mrs. Deane: but the fact is, I'm plagued with a watch that has somehow got six hours out, and I never know whether to take it as six hours fast or six hours slow."

Unpunctual people are privileged to make strange excuses, and Mrs. Deane, who liked Captain Burnett as a relief from the clever people with whom her husband liked to fill his table, and was no arithmetician, accepted his reason with good faith as well as good nature. The contrast in appearance between Mrs. Burnett and her son was one of the very few absolutely perfect things that the world contains. He was nearly six feet high, broad-chested and long limbed, and instead of her vivacity of mouth and eyes his handsome regular features wore an expression of the supremest and most imperturbable calm. A heavy brown moustache added no doubt to his physical advantages in many eyes, but it certainly

took away from the expressive power of a face that had not much expressive power to lose. But the art of abolishing expression is a favourite occupation of our time, and it must not be supposed that the young officer looked the fool that his mother seemed to consider him, or that his bull seemed to imply. Mental laziness, absence of ambition, easy temper, want of words, modesty, and a handsome face, when all combined, have often conferred a very undeserved label on men who are in fact rather more sensible than nine clever people out of ten. It was true enough, as his mother had said, that Dick Burnett was a dunce at school. But in action he had been no dunce even there. Nothing could stir him into any sort of emulation, either in work or play: when personal distinction was to be earned, he kept out of the way, and left it with the utmost indifference to those who cared about such things. He was equally careless and indifferent if playing or rowing on the

winning side. But if rowing or playing for the school when defeat was in the wind, he could be almost relied upon to save the day—the more hopeless it was, the more inexhaustible seemed his hidden reserve of power. He would then come with a burst to the front, stay there till victory was assured, and then fall back, and let others claim the glory. It was the same when, at his own choice, he entered the army. He had no taste for that or any career, but this promised him the best field for inactivity, and his mother admitted, according to a belief that prevailed once upon a time, that he chose wisely — for a fool. And, if England had remained at peace with all the world, he would have carried out his plan of lounging through life, content to be, and not to do—always a gentleman and always a nobody. But England did not remain at peace: and not even Dick Burnett, with all his care, could manage to hide that he had as clear a

head, as stout a heart, and as strong a sword-hand as any man that bore the burden and heat of those terrible Indian days. Any other man who behaved as well, and did as much as he, would have made a lasting name. He did not. And this was all an old and forgotten story now. Dick Burnett quietly took up the old label when all was over, went to sleep again, and hid away his Victoria Cross, as if anything in the shape of a reward was a badge of shame.

Beatrice occupied the silence that usually accompanies soup in comparing the three specimens of young manhood now before her: and her pride of sex was not lessened by the process. There was Tom—"He would have been proud of himself if he had thrown a ball a foot or two more than usual, and when I only hinted he had brains, he was ashamed of the mere suspicion: what can a man be good for who is proud of being a machine, and

ashamed of being more?" There was Captain Burnett—a brave animal. She had passed one in the pound, to the full as respectable, that very day. There was the future Senior Wrangler—Why could he not manage to look like a gentleman besides? One would think, to look at him, that he was a page out of Euclid bound by accident into the Longworth family album. She was certainly hard to please.

But her prejudice against the scholar was merely an unexpressed instinct, for she would not own to herself, however much her taste might insist upon it, that the eccentricities of genius, if shown only in the matter of boots, are presumably its weaknesses, unfitting it so far as they go for the work it has to do. Of course she could not tell that Abel's boots happened to be part of his strength, seeing that they were the outward symbol of a home-made mind. Ex-hurdlemaker as he really was, he had read himself out of vulgarity if not out of awkwardness, and his natural tact prevented

him showing that he was eating with a silver fork for the first time. Much her wisdom knew about the matter !

It must be owned that the table-talk at Longworth, though kept up briskly, was neither witty nor wise. But for that very reason the genius of Winbury was all the more hopelessly at sea. If a single good thing had been said, he might have caught hold of it and thus pulled himself out of his quagmire. As it was, he listened to a Babel, wherein everybody was talking in an unknown tongue. Every commonplace allusion to things or people was as unintelligible as that wonderful mathematical folio had been to him years ago. Was this a sample of the world he had read of—was his brilliant book-world created in contrast to an actual world of Deanes? No wonder he, the genius, had been sent to the wall in what seemed to him a paradise for Toms. It was a bitter thought, but not unwholesome in a way. He believed he was eating mutton, when he

was, in truth, eating the wisdom of the world.

"Annie," said Beatrice, as the four ladies sat round the drawing-room fire when the gentlemen had been left to their wine, "how could you have the face to ask a learned man like Mr. Herrick what he thought of a wretched Italian tenor like Corbacchione?" Her musical tendencies, by the way, were ultra-classical: the word "Italian" was the most contemptuous epithet in all her dictionary. "I would as soon have asked Socrates his opinion of a penny whistle."

"And Socrates, I've no doubt, would have given it you, my dear," said Mrs. Burnett. "And if he had none, he would have asked yours—he was a gentleman. There's no harm, as he's a stranger to all of us, if I say I'm not in love with Tom's friend."

"Why?" asked Beatrice. "Should you not have said—if I'd said so"—

"It was prejudice? And so it is prejudice, my dear. Perhaps he will be my Dr. Fell.

But mark my words : that man is a dreamer—and he'll just be stepping out of his dream. And when that happens, my dears, I would as soon meet a mad Malay."

"Mrs. Burnett ! What *can* you mean ?"

"A man—or a woman, Bee—that dreams all his life through from end to end is no better and no worse than one that's broad awake : he lives in another world and dies there. But just think what happens when he finds all the false lies he's lived in dead set against what's true : or any way against what's thought to be true. He'll keep a private conscience of his own, in which all that's wrong for others may be right for him. Ye may be sure he's been master over his own castles in the air, and won't come down to hard earth without wanting to be master there as well. Just as he's followed his fancies he'll now follow his desires, and think it's all one."

"What a terrible picture you draw of Tom's friend ! Annie is looking quite fright-

ened. But has not every great and good man that ever lived been a dreamer? Has not every poet"—

"Ay, my dear : and died in the dream—except the poets, who have been mostly pretty wide awake, I believe. But you see, when a man wakes from a beautiful dream, as it's sure to be, he can't help hating truth and daylight, and all the ways of them. If he dreams of goodness, he thinks it a lie, because it was a dream—and so it is, for the goodness that's but dreamed of is not goodness at all. 'Of course Tom's friend is just nothing to me, but I wish for the lad's own sake he admired Corbacchione."

"Why—what has that to do with it? I'm glad for his sake he hasn't, for he would have sadly wasted his admiration."

"Because, if he'd admired Corbacchione, he would have shown that he's content with very little, and have proved, just to demonstration, that he's not likely to quarrel with

the world about anything. But ah, lasses, if I'm not in love with Tom's friend, I'm over head and ears with Tom! What—not one of ye with the shadow of a rose? For shame! You ought to be as jealous—but hush! Here they come.” :

CHAPTER IX.

The rosy veil of morning yet
Hung o'er the barren hill:
It made the very snows forget
That they were frozen still.
With phantom beauty, seeming sooth,
The floating cloudlets teem—
But lo, shines out the golden truth—
And lo!—'tis all a dream.

* * * *

The wanderer's eyes in sadness strayed
Across the barren snows:
"Beauty is dead, alas!" he said,
"And falsehood tints the rose.
And when the treacherous bloom I meet
By woodland, lawn, or stream,
I will deny that flowers are sweet,
Because a dream's a dream."

BEATRICE had not much farther opportunity of studying the manners and customs of a future Senior Wrangler during the short evening that divided a very late dinner

from bed-time. It was not Mrs. Burnett's fault, however, if she did not regard him with an interest out of all proportion to any real occasion for it. He was a stranger, he was odd, he was reputed learned, he was mysteriously silent, and now he was labelled "Dangerous." Girls, with all their fine instinct in judging one another, are not ready at appreciating even the boldest shades that distinguish a man from a man: and what better first impression than this could any man wish to make upon any girl?

After a very little music, Tom carried off Captain Burnett and Abel into the smoking-room, whither, though the Winbury school-master's behaviour under these novel circumstances has its temptations, there is no immediate occasion to follow them. Not even the pen, with all its magic, gives the power of omnipresence, and it would be base to indulge in Mr. Deane's Havanas while injustice is being done to Miss Beatrice Deane.

We have seen her with her airs and her tempers, her discontent and her pedantry. Henceforth we must know her, if not like her, better; and some feeling of doubt, or reserve—I hardly know what—seems to hold back the hand that seeks to lift the veil. There is always a half consciousness of sacrilege, let readers scorn the fancy as they may, attendant upon trying to pry into the secrets of the most imaginary soul. But the fancied guilt is doubled in strength when the subject is so real, nay, so commonplace, as Beatrice Deane.

As soon as she entered her room she, as a matter of course, sat down to read. Like all students who have not reached the physician's age, she had found out the charm of night-work, when the body is just tired enough to leave the brain active and clear. She used to consider this hour the best of the twenty-four, and still considered that she considered it so.

She was no genius, like Mrs. Burnett, who

spoke under the mark in calling herself one in ten thousand, and was surely too modest concerning the cause. She was not even exceptionally clever. She was exceptional in nothing—though she might have been thought so once upon a time. The world has always suffered from intermittent fever, and she was born in one of its hot seasons, during which somebody discovered that men had usurped a monopoly of learning and were engaged in a gigantic conspiracy to keep in darkness the sisters of Lady Jane Grey. Good Mr. Deane, always open to anything like a new idea, felt ashamed of the part his sex had played, and of his superiority over Mrs. Deane in a general knowledge of the loves of the gods and goddesses. Being doubly responsible for his two orphan wards, for the very reason that they were not his own children, he determined that they at least should have nothing to complain of, more especially as Annie was labelled from her cradle a wonderfully clever child. The

praises lavished upon her sister's feats of memory fired Beatrice, not with jealousy, but with honest ambition, and she had always been devoured with a desire to please. That was the grand gift that nature had given her as her birth portion. There never was a more purely feminine soul. If there had been an epidemic of playing cards, she would have played them : if of stringing beads, she would have strung them : as it was, learning was in the air. She worked at her tasks, not out of a dream-hunger, like Abel Herrick, but out of sheer docility, and of affection for the people that set them.

She soon left Annie so far behind in the race as to get the label of genius transferred to her own shoulders. All the Deanes' birds—they do not deserve the more specific name—were swans, as has been said before, so that, while yet a child, she had already taken a delicious sip of fame in its most pleasant form of home-praise. So on she worked, encouraged and applauded at every step, until, one day, she

found herself faced by the inevitable question—what does life mean? Her mother had never asked it. But our daughters are not their mothers—whether alas for it, or thanks therefor, their sons and daughters must decide if they can.

The Deanes, like the best of their neighbours, tried to make the best of both worlds, and Beatrice knew well enough what the object of human life is theoretically supposed to be. Moreover she believed what she knew. But even in this matter many questions troubled her. She was not vexed with doubts about matters of doctrine or ritual, or whether she was good enough to go to heaven if she died—her constant study kept her safe from these dissipations of idle souls. But, granting that she was good enough in the main so long as she did nothing wrong, according to the unwritten family creed, life was not to be satisfied with negatives: and a hereafter implies a here. She looked round her, and was hopelessly dissatisfied. Everybody, down to

the least animated ball-dress, had a recognised place, either of use or ornament, except the poor flies like her, who used the brains God had given them only to buzz upon the wheel. Great women, like great men, were no more frequent than in the darkest times. Men brought their brains to market: but even that contemptible use of what must have been given for use was denied to her. They helped her to appreciate and to understand, no doubt, and to open to her an infinity of beautiful and wonderful things: but the joys of a scholar are selfish, and therefore not joys to her. She was even losing the consolation of family sympathy by trespassing upon fields of study into which none could follow her.

So, by degrees, she gradually gathered about her a philosophy of which a great many people have been the original discoverers. It rendered her content, but not satisfied. It taught her that we are bound in duty to follow a useful and elastic phrase called the laws of our being, and that hard

head-work was the law of her being, because she had followed it. But all these things she kept to herself, and openly, in self-defence, argued herself into a simultaneous belief in the inherent nobility of woman's head-work as compared with man's.

And had she never once dreamed of love and marriage all this while? Not once—and it is not strange to say. She had invented her ideal hero, of course, but in such lofty and inconsistent fashion as to be practically nothing at all. He must be a prince in intellect, of course, but at the same time must require her aid. He must be perfectly wise, and yet confirm her in believing all she wished to believe. Finally, he must be utterly unlike any man she had ever seen—which seems to go to the root of the whole matter in a sufficiently obvious way. If keen sight discovers any inconsistencies between her words, between her ideas, or between her ideas and her words, keener insight will know how to account for them in the case of a girl who, as

Mrs. Burnett had said, was the victim of such a formidable conjunction of nineteens. She sought for self knowledge according to the number of her centuries, and failed according to the number of her years.

She took her books, then, and plodded over them conscientiously in spite of the manifold temptations to let her thoughts wander over Mrs. Burnett's unwelcome theories till her thoughts began to wander of their own accord. She went to bed at last. But she woke as usual with the sun, for she had lost the art of sleeping soundly even on a sharp winter's morning, threw a dressing gown over her shoulders, and set herself to improve the first hours of the day by picking up a few early worms of learning. But even so, she was dressed long before the late and irregular breakfast hour at Longworth, and tried to make up for want of sleep by a turn or two in the frosty air. "What nonsense to think I'm not as strong as Mrs. Burnett!" she thought, in the strength of her energy. "I'll show

her that I can eat breakfast as well as she."

Meanwhile, if she had slept but little, Abel had not been able to close his eyes.

Had Milly's lover been introduced to the scene of an imaginary combat *à outrance* wherein he, a knight of one of his romances, had been set to do battle against overwhelming odds in point of numbers, strength, and completeness of armour; had the lady of his heart been there to see: if, despite her influence and his own courage, he had seen himself go down before tougher lances and heavier horsemen: if he had then been asked by the showman of the magic mirror what he should do, he would have answered — as indeed he had often answered such questions — "I should lose neither courage nor honour. I see myself fighting on till I am past lifting a finger: I see myself carried before the princess—namely, Milly Barnes—who crowns me victor because I deserved to win, and whose heart holds me higher because I failed: she

brings me back to health again, or else I die in her arms. If one of my victors, more generous than the rest, has lent me his hand to help me to my feet again, I embrace him as my friend for ever even if we have to fight again: I do my duty as a stout knight and true lover." And now, instead of taking place in a dream, all this had happened in reality, word for word. And the dreamer, brought face to face with facts that gave him as wide a field for showing his knightly virtues as his soul desired, had not recognised that the college examination at St. Kit's was just such a battle-field. Instead of displaying courage in defeat he had filled the field with noisy outcries: he had felt nothing but envy towards his generous conqueror while ungraciously accepting his hand: he had insulted his lady by being ashamed to go to her a beaten man. Of course there is every excuse for his recoiling from a return to Winbury in the character of a detected impostor who had bragged too soon, from hearing behind

his back the sneers of the Vicar, from having to explain to Mrs. Tallis that he could not repay her paltry pounds—he a genius and she but an upper servant!—from having to beg back his hateful place again, and from dashing to the ground Milly's belief in his invincibility. And so there used to be every excuse for many a beaten champion who, we may be sure, though romance is silent on such matters, had to think more of the tongues of his friends than of the swords of his foes, and of how the price or hire of his spoiled armour was to be paid. Abel's dreams had shown him but the glorious aspect of a conquered hero as he poses before the world. Face to face with the world, he did not realise that it is the ignoble elements of defeat that constitute the true glory of constancy.

And what a world it was, to judge from all he had seen! It must needs be despicable, because it evidently despised him. He had learned a great deal at the dinner-table that day. As at St. Kit's he had been esteemed

an ignoramus because, knowing more than the Dean himself, he knew nothing of the little scraps of knowledge that schoolboys knew, so at Longworth he was unable to open his lips for fear of showing that he knew less of the world than a schoolgirl. What was genius at Winbury became at Cambridge ignorance, and at Longworth stupidity. What was he to do? He could never go back to the books that had led to his downfall. He was too old, as well as too poor, to enter the first form at Horchester. He could do nothing, he was fit for nothing, he was penniless save for one gold coin that he had kept to buy Milly a ring in celebration of victory, he now believed in nothing—not even in himself. And yet not one desire had died in him, while a hundred more had been born—and the great truth was gradually bearing down upon him that the use of gold pieces is to buy the world, and the use of study to buy gold. He had wasted his life in beginning at the wrong

end: was it even yet possible to make up for lost time? And if he ever bought the world—he began to dream again—what a glorious purchase it would be for the world! “I hope tutors are paid in advance,” was the companion thought, as he opened his box. The first thing upon which his eyes fell was his manuscript of “The Wars of the Stars.” It was the very voice of all his dreams, and it filled him with loathing. It conjured up before him, not the old airy mystical fancies that he had once thought sublime, but the picture of a flat country village, of a wasted life, of wounded vanity, of lost illusions, of barren zeal. And of Milly too, to whom in his pride he had read every line—and a sorry sort of muse she had proved! He buried the rubbish at the very bottom of his box, so that it might shame his eyes no more.

Unlike Beatrice, he did not wake with the sun, because he had not slept with it. At the first ray of daylight he threw open his window and let in the sharp frosty air. For

the sake of avoiding tediousness I have not been careful to chronicle every little dilemma in which the peasant scholar from Winbury found himself on a first visit to an ordinary English household, seeing that the commonplace things of every day, in proportion as they were familiar matters of course to others, were new and strange to him. What passed for the eccentricities of genius in the drawing-room were no doubt more accurately valued in the servants' hall. But his opening his window at sunrise was no trifle.

The latter portion of his journey from Cambridge had been made in the twilight of a winter afternoon, and he had arrived in the dark, so that the new morning opened yet another new world to his eyes. It was nothing wonderful in itself—only a wide open valley with a broad river winding and curving in the half-distance, and a broken line of hills beyond. There are a thousand

such scenes, and this had not as yet the advantage of green leaves. But it was as if a Dutchman had been conveyed by the magic carpet into Switzerland. Nature as well as life he had gathered from books, and in both cases the reality was utterly unlike his dream. He had been rhyming about rivers and hills for years, and now when he saw ~~them~~ he did not know them. It was not the peaceful beauty of the scene before him that struck him so much as the absolute imposture of his books: his poets themselves, even the greatest, had pretended to carry him into the secret heart of nature, and they had not enabled him to realise a fragment of her outer robe. No wonder, he began to feel, learning such as his was despised by those who lived not among words, but among things. He could see now that the world was right and he was wrong. Fancies were false sirens, one and all, and the whole bulk of them was outweighed by a single hard solid

fact, whatever it might be. And, so thinking, Abel Herrick the dreamer rubbed his eyes and stepped out of his dream.

Not knowing the ways of country houses, he thought it safest to follow the impulse that led him towards the open air. The house was not yet awake, but one of the household at least must have been stirring, for the front door was unfastened. He passed out upon a terrace that overlooked a lawn surrounded by shrubberies. He leaned over the stone parapet and thought: "Longworth was not built of printed bricks, to judge from the people who live in it. I must bring myself down to fight the world with its own weapons, since it refuses to fight with mine—and then, when Milly is mistress of some Longworth, I will show them all what sort of man they have despised. No, I cannot go back to her a poor man. I told her I would claim her as a great and famous man, and I must keep my word."

* * * *

"Why—Captain Burnett!" exclaimed Beatrice as she approached the terrace on her way back from her brisk stroll, "Are *you* an early riser? What would Mrs. Burnett say? You have surprised me out of saying good morning. Perhaps, though, you are not early, but late, and I ought to say good night to you?"

"Well, Miss Deane," began the exceedingly heavy dragoon, slowly and gravely, "the fact is I've been trying to think about things lately, and you see"—The Captain was always at his slowest when this quick-tongued girl was by.

"'And with the morning cool reflection came'—is that it?"

"Well, I suppose that's something like what I wanted to say. I know there wasn't much last night—what a capital fellow your cousin is! He remembers me at Horchester—so we made friends in no time. I wish he was one of ours. But—do you mean to say you've come out this sharp morning with no

more wraps than those? Let me go in and get you"—

"Oh, I like the cold. I thought you'd get on well with Tom—I suppose you settled who was to win every race for the next ten years?"

"Well, some of them. But one doesn't look forward quite as long as that, you know. I wish one could see half the way."

"You speak quite sadly! It is no bad news of the favourite, I hope, that has made you get up to think so early?"

"I wasn't thinking about that—I was thinking about—nothing, I assure you, Miss Deane, on my honour."

Beatrice shrugged her shoulders in imitation of his mother, for the Captain was one of her favourite instances of the impossibility of any woman being so low in the intellectual scale as some men. "And how did you get on with the Senior Wrangler? Did he talk about racing too?"

Abel's left ear began to burn, for from his

vantage-ground on the terrace he heard every word.

"Your cousin's tutor? Well, no—he didn't—he didn't strike me as a man with many ideas. Not exactly the kind of man—I can't exactly explain, but you know what I mean. Not exactly what one would call a gentleman."

"I can guess. He's Tom's tutor, is he? What could have put it into Tom's head to bring down a tutor? Has his scholarship got into his head, and put a spark of ambition into him?—I think I know who will make most use of the tutor," she thought. "Longworth will not be such waste of time, after all."

"I don't know—I suppose he wants to cram for something, poor fellow. But I want you to do me a favour, if you will."

"Let me hear first what it is, please."

"Well, you see—it's hard to explain—but I wish *you* wouldn't think I think of nothing but nothing. I don't mind what other people

think, you know, but you see—I really *have* been thinking ever since that talk we had at the Campbells', if you haven't forgotten"—

"I have, though, every word. I never can remember what people say at evening parties—except that the room is hot, and then I always forget at which party I heard it."

A look of disappointment came into the soldier's eyes. "I dare say you've got better things to think of, but I haven't, you see. Don't you remember saying you wondered how a man could go drifting on through life without seeing an end to it, and not putting his back into something, if it was only breaking stones on the road? You said more than that, but that was what it came to"—

"I said it? Why, everybody has said it. You must have heard it hundreds and thousands of times. Do you mean to say Mrs. Burnett left you to hear it from me?"

"I dare say you're right, but everybody isn't you."

"And in that I'm sure you're right. Aren't you getting hungry? I think we had better go in and see if it isn't breakfast-time."

"Wait one minute, Miss Deane, please! It's just all the difference who it is that says a thing. I want to see an end to it and to put my back into something. But you see life with us is such a confoundedly easy-going thing"——

"True!" sighed Beatrice.

"That what's a man to do?"

"What's a woman to do, you mean? If I were a man, I should soon know what to do."

"Tell me what it is, and I'll put my back into that!" he said with a tone that was not very unlike energy.

"I'm afraid that's little use. I don't think our aims could ever agree."

"You have a right to say that, I suppose. But tell me what you'd have me do, and then see. You have just made me hate and despise myself—do you think if ever—if I could ever make myself whatever you want a

man to be—I dare say I'm an ass to think of such a thing—but do you think you could ever, if I did that"—

Beatrice had been hastening her walk, but she now stopped in dismay. She had never yet had an offer, but she knew what was coming—and from the stupidest man she knew! It was like an insult to her intellect—but she just glanced at the soldier, and read in his eyes what deprives even a philosopher of coherent words. In its way it was finer eloquence than the oration in which the poet Abel had made love to Milly Barnes.

"I mean I love you with all my heart," said Dick Burnett more slowly and gravely than ever. "And I never loved anybody in my life before. And now I suppose you'll send me about my business," he said with a sigh. "I said I was an ass. I didn't mean to tell you that till I'd shown you—but it's out now. Never mind: I'll"—

No doubt, as Annie had noticed, the undemonstrative Captain had paid her attentions

through a London after-season, but Beatrice was honestly surprised, and after the first moment honestly pained. She would as soon have thought of marrying Dick Burnett as her cousin, or her cousin's tutor. Not even the prospect of having Mrs. Burnett for a mother-in-law—a strange form of temptation!—drew her towards the son. She scarcely felt flattered, brave and honest gentleman as everybody knew him to be.

“There, dear Captain Burnett,” she said giving him her hand and her best and brightest smile. “Please don’t say a word more. I really never thought you could think of me in that way—I should never make a wife for you, even if I tried—and I should not try. You want somebody the very opposite of me, not a girl who would be always sitting by herself over her books and papers. No—you must never think of such a piece of folly, or say a word about it again.”

Her manner more than her words was

enough to overthrow the hopes of one who was weak enough to think nothing of himself in comparison with her. But he took her hand, and she let him hold it, out of kindness, while he looked at her sadly and silently. There was no doubt a great deal he might have said, but his tongue was slow.

They came side by side, still in silence, up the steps of the terrace, and Abel thought it advisable to shift the position that had given him a bird's eye view of this private scene. At first he thought of returning to the house : but Beatrice caught sight of him and, glad enough of the relief of an interruption to her *tête-à-tête*, nodded a good morning.

"We are all early risers it seems," she said with forced lightness, as Dick Burnett went back to the house dismally : for it was clear that the poor fellow was more deeply wounded than he could tell himself even, and Beatrice could not see his disappointment, however absurd it might be, without a pang.

Abel felt painfully shy at finding himself

for the first time alone with a young lady : for of course such a title did not apply to Milly Barnes. He had not the consolation of knowing that she stood in far greater awe of him and his prestige, and she had just been told, on military authority, that he was not exactly a gentleman—a word he used in a sense different from hers.

“This is a very beautiful place, Miss—Deane,” he said, adding the surname just in time.

“We think so. I suppose this country is new to you? It is very different from what you have at Cambridge, I suppose.”

“Very.”

“I hear you are going to ‘coach’ Tom—is not that the proper word? I hope you will have a pleasant visit, but I suppose you will be glad to hear that we are not usually very lively. I am so glad Mrs. Burnett is staying here just now.”

“So am I,” said Abel, without knowing why.

"Of course you know her books by heart, such a great mathematician as you are! I hope, Mr. Herrick, you are not one of those people who think that learning is unfit for girls?"

It was with such questions as these, dragged in by the head and shoulders by way of conversational challenge, that Beatrice had fallen out of masculine favour, except with those who were wise enough to tolerate any sort of enthusiasm and with those who, like Dick Burnett, were stupid enough to hold everything she said or did to be right and wise.

"I?" asked Abel, to whom the question was new, in a tone of surprise that sounded like wonder at his being suspected of holding such an idea.

"I am so glad of that! I suppose, as you are Tom's teacher, you will not mind my asking you a question or two now and then? I find it very hard to get on as fast as I wish, here at Longworth where there is nobody to help me—and when I go

to Mrs. Burnett she only answers by telling me to shut up my books and walk up the hill."

Even Milly's lover could not help feeling the charm of finding, in this unexpected quarter, a real girl, out of a dream, who obviously accepted him off-hand at his own valuation. Her careless words were balm to his wounded vanity, and his self-confidence began to blossom anew.

"I shall be proud to help you in every way I can, Miss Deane," he said, almost in his old despotic way.

"Thank you indeed! I will not promise not to be troublesome. Are you going to stay with Tom—my cousin—long?"

"I am not sure"—

"You will find one thing here—a very fair library. That is my department: and I took care that the builders should not give it an inch less space than I chose. Tom will no doubt introduce you to the billiard room, if you care about playing at ball. Ah—who

coming up the drive? What
have here?"

in my way, miss?" asked
from below the terrace.
— or parasols? Any

"

go to the back—

unusually shabby-
knife-grinder, of more than
He had an unusually shabby-
ing lurcher, or mongrel, at his heels, and
ed before him a half broken-down truck,
he front of which was painted, in
shing white letters, "Cornelius Boswell,
er in Hardware, and, by Appointment,
rella-repairer in Ordinary to Her Majesty
Queen."

Thank ye, miss. Sorry if I've made any
like, and I ax your pardon, but all this
e be so turned about since I were last this
that, as a travelling tradesman with all
land, I may say, for his beat, I may be

to Mrs. Burnett she only answers by telling me to shut up my books and walk up the hill."

Even Milly's lover could not help feeling the charm of finding, in this unexpected quarter, a real girl, out of a dream, who obviously accepted him off-hand at his own valuation. Her careless words were balm to his wounded vanity, and his self-confidence began to blossom anew.

"I shall be proud to help you in every way I can, Miss Deane," he said, almost in his old despotic way.

"Thank you indeed! I will not promise not to be troublesome. Are you going to stay with Tom—my cousin—long?"

"I am not sure"—

"You will find one thing here—a very fair library. That is my department: and I took care that the builders should not give it an inch less space than I chose. Tom will no doubt introduce you to the billiard room, if you care about playing at ball. Ah—who

is that man coming up the drive? What business can he have here?"

"Any job here in my way, miss?" asked a hoarse voice from below the terrace. "Any old umbrellas — or parasols? Any scissors to grind?"

"Nothing. You should go to the back—not up the drive."

The trespasser was an unusually shabby-looking tinker, or knife-grinder, of more than middle-age. He had an unusually shabby-looking lurcher, or mongrel, at his heels, and pushed before him a half broken-down truck, on the front of which was painted, in flourishing white letters, "Cornelius Boswell, Dealer in Hardware, and, by Appointment, Umbrella-repairer in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen."

"Thank ye, miss. Sorry if I've made any mistake, and I ax your pardon, but all this house be so turned about since I were last this way, that, as a travelling tradesman with all England, I may say, for his beat, I may be

excused. Sure all your scissors are sharp, miss? Sure you've got no little job my way? P'raps some of the servants may. Hulloo! Good morning to ye, master! Got e'er a penknife to grind. How's all at Win'—

Abel's ears were still smarting with his having been called no gentleman in those of Miss Deane. By gentleman he understood two things—one, what his books of heraldry had told him, the other what the Winbury people believed a gentleman to be, thereby not including village-schoolmasters, hurdle-makers, or parish-foundlings. And now ill-luck, in Miss Deane's very presence, had sent him this miserable tinker who knew him, heaven alone knew how, and had it on the tip of his tongue to say what might prove Abel to be no gentleman in the eyes of a charming young lady who at present looked up to him.

"No," he said, cutting short the name of Winbury. "Come—don't you hear the lady telling you to be off? There's nothing here."

He spoke with impolitic impatience. "Eh!" asked the tinker with a touch of impudence in his tone. "Let the lady tell me so herself, if *you* please. I can see through a mill-stone as well as my neighbours. *I* can. But as to Win—— however, if you haven't got a penknife, you may have something to get a drink this sharp morning, and that's another pair of shoes."

"Take that then, and be off with you," said Abel, who saw to his dismay that this chance tramp had managed to read a thought of which he was ashamed. "Take that——" Alas! He had but one coin in his pocket, and that was the gold piece he had reserved for Milly's ring.

"Thank *you*, sir!" said the tinker in anticipation. "Mum's the word" he whispered hoarsely through the hollow of his hand. There was nothing for it but to drop the sovereign, as if it were a sixpence, over the parapet. The tinker stared for a moment, and pocketed the coin. "A regular chip of

the old block you be, sir, and good luck to you and the young lady, that's what I say," he said, as he earned his tip by taking himself off down the drive.

"What does he mean? Is he tipsy?" asked Beatrice, bewildered and scared.

"I expect so," said Abel, more pale than she. "I thought it better to spend a few coppers than to run the risk of anything unpleasant to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Herrick," said Beatrice. But Abel's attempt to prove himself a gentleman was a comparative failure, after all. Tom, or even Captain Burnett, would have acted differently. On the other hand, however, her professed contempt for masculine brute force obliged her, for consistency's sake, to respect Abel's temper, prudence, and thoughtfulness for herself all the more.

"Where's Dick, Mrs. Deane?" asked Mrs. Burnett at the breakfast table. "In bed, of course. He seldom gets up till to-morrow,

and not often then. They call him 'Sleepy Dick' in the regiment—an honourable nickname for an officer, isn't it, my dear?"

But "Good morning!" said Dick himself while his mother was still speaking. He spoke even more good-humouredly than usual, and Beatrice herself, with every reason to know it, could hardly believe that she saw before her a rejected lover. But Tom, who had been a little boy at Horchester when the Captain was a very big boy, said to himself, "Hulloa! Sleepy Dick looks as he used to when he was playing on the losing side—and when that happens, I'd rather be anywhere but on the winning one."

CHAPTER X.

There was a maze within an hundred gates.
Over the first was broadly written, "Here
Doth lie the road to Love:" and o'er the next
"Here lies the road to Love:" and o'er the third
The self-same legend, and o'er all the same,
Save o'er the last, and naught was written there.
Yet one gate only led within the maze,
And he who found it knew not how to read.
Read ye, who can, and name the gate of Love.

BREAKFAST being over, the question
arose as to what should be done with
the morning.

"I suppose Tom may be left out of the
question now," said Beatrice. "Of course he
will be with Mr. Herrick now, all day and
every day."

"Well," said Tom, who having rashly

burdened himself with a tutor was beginning to wonder what he should do with him. "First days at home never count for anything. We'll lay our plans to-morrow, Herrick. I must take a look round the place, and see what's been done, for the first thing. Burnett, I dare say, will take you girls for a canter, if he's got nothing better to do."

"But I have something better—I mean something else," Beatrice interrupted herself, feeling that Captain Burnett must be safe from her quiver for evermore, in spite of the contempt she felt for a man who, even when he talked of making himself energetic, put before him the pitiful prize of a girl's hand as the whole aim of his energy. The Captain did not seem to notice, however, but finished his coffee sleepily.

"Why, Bee, you don't mean to say you go on with your eternal grind down here? Burnett, you must drag her out, whether she will or no."

"Miss Deane knows I am always at her

service," said the Captain. "But I've got something better to do to-day."

"Dick!" said his mother, "Is that the politeness of nowadays? I've not the least doubt young men sometimes thought it what you call a bore to dance attendance on young women when I was a girl, but they had the manners not to say so. What a singular difference there is between a snuff-box and a pipe, Mrs. Deane! I have no liking for either, but it is a fact that real manners went out with snuff-boxes."

"Well, mother," said the Captain good-humouredly, "that's because you used to allow snuff in drawing-rooms, and drive tobacco into the smoking-room, though it's the cleaner of the two."

Even Beatrice felt piqued at the cool way in which one who had, but an hour ago, professed to have received the death-blow to his hopes, bore his refusal. She would not marry him for the world, but still it was not as gratifying as it ought to have been to

find her rejected lover so easily cured. He might as well have been broken-hearted for a day. Perhaps had he taken snuff he might have been. "Fancy a girl being consoled by a pipe for the loss of a thimble!" she thought scornfully. "Well—I shall know what to think if such a thing ever happens again."

"I'm going to have a cigar, any way," said Tom, "and if nobody else knows what they're going to do, they must find out for themselves. You'd better come too, Burnett—perhaps in half an hour they'll have made up their minds. Do you think you can manage to amuse yourself this morning, Herrick, without being looked after?"

"I dare say Mr. Herrick would like to see the library," said Beatrice, who had fully made up her mind to take possession of the tutor, and while she looked up to him, felt he was one whom she could patronise.

"Well—*chacun à son goût*," said Tom, quoting, in an accent of his own invention,

the only scrap of French that he knew. And so the party broke up at last, and Abel Herrick, after a while, found himself alone once more with Beatrice Deane. He, like Captain Burnett, ought to have found some better way of spending the morning, seeing that his letters to Milly were frightfully in arrear, and that she did not even know where to write to him. But that was now an old story, though of course, as a true knight of romance, he was bound to love her still.

The library at Longworth was very different from the worm-eaten shelves at Winbury, or even from the Vicar's dreary-looking collection of divinity and law. It was large, light and luxurious, as well fitted to sleep as to work in, and used for the former purpose by all the family but one. Beatrice saw Abel's look of wonder and admiration, and felt pleased and proud.

"Of course this is nothing to you," she said, "who know the great libraries in Cambridge and London, but you see I have had

to make my own. My uncle is very good, and always lets me have my way."

At that moment it suddenly struck the young man that she was very beautiful. His only standard—as a lover's should be—was Milly: and Beatrice Deane was beyond all question a prettier girl than Milly Barnes. And then there was a great deal about her, in comparison with Milly, that the blindest of lovers could not fail to perceive. There were differences of manner, of dress, of birth perhaps, and certainly of breeding. He had taken Milly for his muse—a raw school-girl muse from Miss Baxter's academy: but here was a real muse surrounded by her world of books as a student's muse should be, and glorying therein. He admired her for having refused Captain Burnett, towards whom he felt as a *sans-culotte* towards a duke and peer, and he admired her still more for the brightness given her by the sun that streamed through the window. Abel was still poet enough to see a little more than

was to be seen. And this was the girl who had been told that he was no gentleman—the word remained sticking in his throat after his shame for the weakness that had almost justified the accusation had passed away. If she really knew that he was a peasant, and an intellectual impostor, what would she say then? We know what she would have said—your birth is your honour, and your defeat your misfortune. But, as he stood before her, he felt ashamed. It was hard, he thought: for he felt convinced that he must have been born a real gentleman if the truth were known.


“You should have seen this house before it was built, as they used to say of Marshal Wade’s roads,” said Beatrice. “It was a wretched old place then, half tumbling to the ground. It used to belong to a very famous old family named Vane—when the last of them died, it came to my grandmother, Mrs. Deane, who was his sister. That was her portrait that you saw in the dining-room.

We are rather a complicated family, what with Deanes, Eliots, and Vanes—you see my uncle and my cousin have different names, though they're father and son."

Even this had now become galling to the herald and genealogist who did not himself own so much as a father, and who knew nothing about his own name except that it was not his own.

"That picture," she went on, "is our father—mine and Annie's—who was killed in the battle of Balaklava, when we were both little girls. I hardly remember him, though, for he was always away, and my uncle has always been our real father. And that—let me see—oh, that is the last of the real Vanes—my grandmother's brother, from whom we got Longworth."

Abel glanced at the picture of the last of the Vanes—a girlish looking young man in hussar uniform. He had no eye for pictures, considered as works of art, but he seemed to see in this something more than the portrait



of a stranger. The round, beardless, girlish face, with the pink cheeks, light brown hair, and grey eyes, smote his conscience—perhaps it was because the features were so commonplace that they somehow suggested Milly. And then there was another reason—the name of Vane naturally suggested Winbury to Winbury ears, however far from home it might be heard.

So far Beatrice had done all the talking. Abel's silence, added to his reputation, still helped to distinguish him from the herd of young men—he had not paid her a single compliment, and that alone was a great deal. So she could not help condescending to feel curious about the antecedents of her new friend. Curiosity, when rebaptised into interest, is permitted all over the world.

“Yours is rather an unusual name,” she said. “I never met with it except in this very book-room. If you are descended from a really great man, I am afraid I have been only making you laugh at our family his-

tory. I never heard of a Vane or a Deane being distinguished for anything yet — I have all the ambition, and I am not a man."

"I never heard that my family was connected with the poet's," said Abel. "But of course it might be." He was thinking that if the Vanes and the Deanes had built up a house like this they had given their descendant small cause to complain of them for having done no more. After all, if life was a thing to be lived and enjoyed, as it seemed to be, he began to think that a house might dispense with a book-room.

"Even Mrs. Burnett does not seem to understand what difficulties she herself has conquered," Beatrice went on, encouraged by her listener's silence. "I suppose they would say I have not her genius to begin with—but want of genius is never supposed to stand in a man's way. Nobody says to a man, You have no genius, so you must fold your hands and sit still. They say You must work to

make up for it ; and so I say it to myself, as nobody says it to me. You must help me, Mr. Herrick, please, whatever they say. I hope there will be nothing to prevent your staying here a long time."

A stupid man would have thought she was challenging him to a flirtation : a sensible man that she was so much in earnest about her own wants and wishes as to be thinking of him very little or not at all. But Abel was neither stupid nor sensible. His mystical reading had introduced him to the science of affinities and sympathies between souls. There was a revival of his own dying enthusiasm in her words and in the tone in which she spoke them, and he thought sadly how long it might have been before he heard himself flattered by a house-keeper's niece as the daughter of the Vanes, Deanes, and Eliots was unintentionally flattering him now. She saw his face light up for the first time since his defeat at Cambridge, and took it for the sympathetic

enthusiasm that she had failed to find elsewhere.

"I don't know how long I may stay," he said. "If you knew everything—well, I have my way to make in the world. But if I can do anything to help you, I will."

"That is a bargain, then. I suppose you will amuse yourself well enough here till lunch time? I am going to make a long list of everything I want you to help me in."

"You have been all this while with Tom's tutor?" said Annie, as Beatrice joined her in their own morning room. "Mind, Bee—I like 'sleepy Dick' much the better of the two; and if you go turning the tutor's head"——

"Can't a girl speak three words to any man without hearing that eternal word, flirtation, that always interferes to spoil everything? And if I wanted to flirt—why I hope I should have better taste than to choose Mr. Herrick, indeed. And don't say

anything about Captain Burnett any more, there's a good girl."

"Bee—you don't mean it has really come at last? Why when could it have been—what did he say? He wasn't down till we'd half done breakfast, and ever since then"—

"It was before breakfast."

"Oh, Bee—how could you have had the heart to say no! Well—you may say you never flirt, and they say I do: but all the same, if I wanted to do it well, I should come to you to take lessons."

"Don't tease me now, Annie, there's a dear girl. I've got ever so much to do. I've got to get ready thousands of questions for Mr. Herrick—one doesn't get hold of a Senior Wrangler every day, and I must make hay while the sun shines."

"Very good, Bee. The next time they accuse me of flirting, I shall say—Not at all: I'm only 'making hay while the sun shines.'"

CHAPTER XI.

We love ? What else ? Hath not the language told it
Of words, and looks and touches—more than words ?
Whence but from Love is this our life unfolded
That blooms with Spring and carols with the birds ?

'Tis Spring ? Naught else, and bird to bird is calling :
'Tis May, and all the whole year through 'tis May :
Love, like the leaf, hath naught to do with falling—
Love, like the swallow, never flies away.

MEANWHILE, Winbury still slept on,
though its schoolmaster was literally
“abroad,” in the sense of being away from
home. It is surprising what little difference
the absence of a great man made to a little
world. Tuesday repeated Monday like a
parrot, and Wednesday Tuesday. Even
Sunday was but a slumber within a slumber.

The one event was that a score or so of little boys and girls were condemned to a holiday out of season : but of that the sufferers themselves were the last to complain. Lucky was it for the birds that they had not yet begun to set up housekeeping.

Mrs. Tallis at the Manor House was busily engaged in preparing for the great Spring Cleaning by daily rehearsals. Milly, though a finished pupil of Miss Baxter's establishment, was a willing and helpful girl, with a soul not above easing older hands of the mop and duster : but, with all her ready good-will, she might as well have tried to wrest the broom from the hands of the scavenger of the Augean stables as from those of her Aunt Anne. Mrs. Tallis hugged her martyrdom of hard work, and indulged in hourly sarcasm at the expense of girls who sat with their hands before them : and yet she would scarcely allow her niece to indulge in so much as a needle. At last it gave her aunt so much pain to relieve her

of even a moment's trouble over a grain of dust that Milly gave up trying to help her in despair, and took to idleness out of a spirit of self-sacrifice, though she had to put up with many unjust reproaches for not doing what she was not allowed to do.

"Well—I must have up Mrs. Herrick again, I suppose," said Mrs. Tallis one morning. "A house like this is really too much, properly speaking, for one single pair of hands, with nobody but me in it who knows how to do a thing. No, Milly—I know what you're going to say: but I don't care about things being done so that I have to do them all over again."

"Why won't you teach me how to do things, aunt?"

"Oh, I can't waste my time over teaching. I know my place and my duty, and what's proper for me isn't proper for you," she added, guarding her complaint from being taken practically. "I haven't been at Miss Baxter's—I hope they taught you something

different from house-work there, or my expense has been sadly thrown away."

"Well, aunt—I suppose the use of the globes wouldn't help one very far in scrubbing a floor, though calisthenics might help one to scrub prettily. Do, please, let me try!"

"No, Milly. I don't want things done prettily: I want them done well. If you must do something, you can put the books in order, for fear Mr. Smith should come and see they have not got put back in their proper places. That's a thing I can't be expected to waste my time over, and that boy Abel never could be trusted to put a thing just wherever he took it from."

"Thank you, aunt! And when I've done the books?"

"Gracious me! There'll be time enough to think about that when the books are done. I dare say by that time they'll have got out of order again—that's the way with things: as soon as ever I get to the bottom

of the house I'm wanted at the top again. But I shall never get on if I stand talking here. I'm going to Mrs. Herrick's—I shan't be five minutes, if anybody calls."

"Couldn't I run there for you, aunt?"

"No, Milly—don't bother so. I've got my work to do, and I shall never get it done if I'm hindered doing it my own way."

Milly sighed, half vexed, half amused: for she pretty well guessed that a secret liking for a bit of gossip, such as may without loss of dignity be indulged in by a great lady with her humble dependants, lay somewhere at the bottom of her aunt's occasional excursions into the village. Mrs. Tallis, with the air of a martyr, put on her coal-scuttle bonnet and long blue cloak, and went to make arrangements with her favourite charwoman.

She generally found Mrs. Herrick up to the elbows in soap-suds, for the clique of village matrons that ruled the Vicar's household had lately elected her to the office of

his washerwoman in ordinary—no bad appointment for the mother of eight children who never seemed to get any older, but by no means agreeable to Mrs. Tallis, who liked her *protégées*, as she liked her merits as a housekeeper, to be wholly and solely her own. But on this occasion not only Mrs. Herrick, but her husband the hurdle-maker and four of her eight children were gathered together in the kitchen round a girl in whom Mrs. Tallis, rather scornfully and jealously, recognised the Vicar's housemaid.

"If you're not too busy now to do my work, Mrs. Herrick," she began with biting severity, "I would request you"—

"Oh, Mrs. Tallis—oh, ma'am!" interrupted Mrs. Herrick, forgetting the humble curtsy due to her patroness, "Oh, ma'am! whatever is this that's happened to our Abel?"

"Happened to Abel?"

"Aye, ma'am—do tell Mrs. Tallis, Jane—you're a better scholar than me. It does

beat me, ma'am, aye, and Thomas too—but 'tis something fine and wonderful, sure!"

"Yes, ma'am," said the housemaid, with a gossip's pride in a rare specimen of original information. "Master had a letter from the schoolmaster this very morning, and I—oh, he was that mad about it you never did see!"

"But what was it?"

"Yes, indeed, ma'am! I never knew him in such a way—there'll have to be a new schoolmaster. Mrs. Brown at the Post Office says he's been and made Master of London, ma'am, at ever so much—she wouldn't wonder if 'twere as much as a hundred pound a quarter. Mercy on us! We shall have to call him Squire Herrick now."

"Gracious me! Master of London—what-ever can that be?"

"Don't you know, ma'am?" asked Mrs. Herrick. "We thought you'd be sure to know."

"They can't mean Lord Mayor? Why

he's never been apprenticed. How did Mrs. Brown know?"

"Oh, ma'am," said Jane, "the posts have their way of knowing what goes on. Why when our John 'listed for a soldier, Mrs. Brown knew it hours before father."

Mrs. Tallis was as much impressed by the news as Jane could have wished, but she was not the person to betray ignorance, far less surprise.

"Well, Mrs. Herrick," she said, with extra severity, "all I can say is I'm very glad to hear it indeed. I suppose he'll do something for you now he's got so high. He'll hardly let you take in washing now—so you'll be free, I hope, to help me in my Spring Cleaning."

"Then, ma'am, you think all's surely true?"

But the housekeeper was not going to be driven into a direct committal of herself to an opinion. She, like the Vicar, could be hard of hearing if she pleased, and left the cot-

tage, resisting the undignified temptation to pay a visit to the all-sorts shop, where Mrs. Brown took charge of the limited correspondence of Winbury.

Near the lodge gate she was met by her friend Mr. Pottinger.

"Hulloa, Mrs. Tallis!" said the constable, "what's our schoolmaster been doing now?"

"Ah!—what have you heard?" asked Mrs. Tallis, with eager but cautious curiosity.

"They've found his father, that's some great lord, and has owned up to him and left him his name and his title and all his money, like a man—that's what they say. Do you think such a thing can be true?"

"Gracious goodness! Abel Herrick turned out to be a lord—you don't say so!"

"What—haven't you heard"—

"All in good time, Mr. Pottinger—all in good time!" she answered evasively, and hurried on.

"Why, whatever is all this about Abel, Milly?" she asked in her turn, as she went straight into the room where Milly was puzzling over the order in which the old books could possibly be supposed to stand with any pretence to symmetry.

"About Abel?" exclaimed Milly, suddenly letting a heavy folio fall from her hands, and turning first pink and then pale.

"Yes—some say he's been made Lord Mayor, and some say he's turned out to be a duke's eldest son. What in the name of gracious can they mean?"

"A Lord Mayor—a duke's son!" Milly felt not only herself but the whole room turning round and round with amaze. "I'll run to the Post Office—there'll be a letter for me—for us"—

"Why, Milly! A man who's going to be a duke isn't very likely to write to you or me, I suppose, till he sends me back that ten pounds I lent him the other day."

"Perhaps he's done it, aunt—perhaps it's waiting for you now. I'll run at once"—

"No, Milly," said Mrs. Tallis, severely restraining her own burning curiosity. "We must wait and have our letters brought to us properly. We must not have it supposed we are so eager for news that we cannot wait a few minutes, and indeed it would not be becoming in you to be seen careering about the village for tidings of any young man—all the less if it's true what they say—and I hope it is so, I'm sure. Now don't be so flighty, but listen to me about something else before I get to work again. Come, Milly, listen to me, and don't look out of the window."

"Yes, aunt, I'm listening," said Milly with a sigh of impatient resignation. Though always being scolded in words and always spoiled in deeds, she did not pout: so that either Miss Baxter, or Madame Nature, deserved considerable credit for what they had turned out between them.

"Mr. Adams is coming over from Eastington."

"Is he?"

"Yes, he is now a real lawyer, you know, and is out of his articles. I have every reason to think him an honest and a clever young man."

"Yes, aunt. If he is not the cleverest young man in all Eastington, all I can say is that he is very much mistaken."

"Exactly so, Milly, and he is a gentlemanly young man besides. So—listen to me attentively, Milly—so, as you are now very nearly twenty-one, I am going at once to carry out the scheme"—

"Aunt?—Please don't say you want me to be Mrs. Adams!"

"Good gracious, child, what could have made you think of such a thing? Mrs. Adams, indeed!"

"You don't know how you frightened me."

"The idea of such a thing! I wish you

would attend, and not put me out with such ludicrous imaginations. Where was I?"

But Milly was unable to help her. Her thoughts were in Mrs. Brown's shop, and there, in spite of her, they seemed resolved to remain.

"Ah!—I remember," said her aunt. "The scheme for which I have been putting by every penny I could scrape together, Milly, ever since you used to roll about on that hearthrug—for which I incurred the expense of sending you to the best establishment in Eastington. Well I know, my dear, the money that will have to be spent before—Milly—Milly! Can't you—where *are* you off to now?"

"A letter, aunt—a letter! There's Mrs. Brown coming through the garden—wait one moment"—and she was out of the room and down the stairs, three at a time, before Mrs. Tallis could say another word.

"Milly!—Milly!" she called after the girl in vain. "Well—of all the madcap hussies!"

she said to herself, with cross fondness and admiring vexation.

“Here it is—didn’t I say so!” exclaimed Milly as she returned, waving an open letter triumphantly in the air. “He’s not a duke—he’s not a Lord Mayor—but he’s just what I knew he’d be—he’s got the thing at Cambridge”——

“Oh!—that’s all, is it? But how does he come to have written to you?”

Milly said nothing, but placed the letter in her aunt’s hand. We, who sat at Abel’s elbow while he penned it, may not be perfectly satisfied with her ready display of what was, despite its stiffness of phrase, nothing more or less than a love letter. But it was at any rate frank, and perhaps the best way of saving long and difficult explanations that could be devised on the spur of the moment. She was far too proud to be shy. Abel had climbed from the bottom to the top of the ladder for her sake, and she was indeed a lucky girl. While her dearest school-friend,

with all the advantages of the best professional society in Eastington, had not yet been able to report the ghost of an offer, she, with all the disadvantages of solitude in Winbury, was engaged, before she had left school a year, to a great man, whose humble origin need not be included in the advertisement of the marriage.

Mrs. Tallis spread open the letter with provoking deliberation, settled her spectacles, and read the letter slowly right through.

"I don't understand," she said at last. "I suppose he has done something very wonderful—and he a boy that never did anything but grub over those dusty books that I never could keep clean, or get clean, and could hardly tell his right hand from his left—moonstruck I used to think him. But what does he mean by daring to write to you like that? A regular offer I should call it, if my spectacles did not deceive me?"

"That's why I gave it you, aunt," said

Milly, blushing like a rose. "He wouldn't let me speak to you till he knew if all was right—oh, dear aunt, I am so glad that I may speak now!" She threw her arms round the old lady's neck. "Aren't you glad too? Won't the wedding be fun!"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Tallis after a long pause of blank dismay. "Oh, dear—here's a pretty kett—here is a melancholy dilemma! Oh Milly, Milly! And just when I was going to—whatever is to be done now?"

Milly lifted up her blushing face in wonder. What possible dilemma could there be? Abel had proposed to her, they were engaged, they were to be married—means had been wanting and now they were supplied; position had been wanting on the part of the bridegroom, and now he was above the bride. Surely the whole matter ought to be as good as done? What could Mrs. Tallis mean? She looked at her aunt, and could hardly swallow her disappointment. Not a

doubt had entered her mind that she was going to give the old lady a glorious surprise by startling her with the news that her Milly was the chosen of the hero of the hour.

“Oh!” she said at last, “I never, never thought you’d have taken it so!”

Mrs. Tallis was not young: it is doubtful if she had ever been young. If so, she had forgotten it, and was incapable of continuing the story of her own youth in that of others. She saw with her spectacles, not with her eyes, and did not observe the little signs of colour and accent that called for sympathy, even if indulgence was out of the question.

“And how did you think I should have taken it, pray? Why I was a grown woman when Mr. Tallis first asked me the question, and he a grown man. For goodness’ sake, put such idle nonsense out of your head, and never let me hear of your doing it again.”

After the first disappointment, however, Milly had recovered her courage and her smile. That had been her aunt's way as long as she could remember—to spoil her to the utmost, and to reconcile unlimited indulgence with the severest theories of education by trying to hide it under a barren scolding. Whenever Mrs. Talkis was crosser and sternest Milly knew from experience she was nearest giving way.

“I promise you that, aunt, faithfully—never, as long as I live, to do it again. So you'll let me marry Abel just this once, won't you? Especially as it can't be helped now. You see we shall get older and older every day—and indeed there is no need to marry to-morrow. It will keep very well, and I'll wait till I'm as old as you were, if you please. To be engaged is the great thing.”

“Milly! Don't you know you're a young lady—from Miss Baxter's? Young ladies don't marry hurdle-makers that are picked

up under hedges—or they live to repent of it whenever they do. I don't say but what Abel Herrick is a good young man, and he may be clever, though nothing like Mr. Adams, to my mind—and being as I may say responsible for his existence, it was my duty to help him to better his situation, and very pleased I am that he has laid out the few pounds I lent him so well. But all the same he is not a fit and proper person to admit into the family."

"Good gracious, aunt? What family? Why what was father but a"—

"Honour your father and your mother, Milly, that your days may be long in the land that's been given you," said Mrs. Tallis severely.

"I was only going to say father was but a carpenter and joiner. And then I have no land."

"Ah! But you don't know what mayn't happen one of these days. If instead of running off to the post you had only listened

to me—but there, it's no manner of use talking business to such a child. I've brought you up to adorn *any* station, Milly—think of that! And now you would throw yourself away on the first parish foundling that asks you. What would Mr. Adams say! Oh, Milly, if I could have seen this day, I'd have thrown every penny I had into the canal."

So that was it, then—Mr. Adams was coming over to make her aunt's will, and her aunt had been earning the character of a half miser to bring her up like a lady, and to leave her enough to make her one. At least so she interpreted the hints to which she had listened so badly. A hard lump seemed to rise in her throat and her eyes filled with tears. Talk of death pains youthful ears not unpleasantly, but a word about preparing for it is like the thought of the packing-up that spoils the anticipation of the most welcome journey—as the departure of a good woman ought to be. How could her aunt, whom she loved, be so cruel as to speak

of such things? How could Mrs. Tallis even dream that she would listen, in cold and sordid patience, to talk of what she would gain by the funeral of her more than mother?

"Please—please don't tell me how good you've been to me," she said with all her heart in her voice. "I know all that—I'd do anything to show I do, anything—but"——

"But the only thing you must not think of doing," said Mrs. Tallis, sadly and coldly.

There was no mistaking her meaning this time. Milly had looked for a good round scolding, or at least for a pretence of it, and she was met by firmness instead of anger, and by the insultingly unjust supposition, as it seemed, that the threat of losing her aunt's money would make her false to Abel. It was too bad. Her aunt had admitted Abel's good qualities, and only objected to him on the score of its being below the dignity of a working carpenter's daughter to marry a gentleman and a scholar because he had

once made hurdles. Had Mrs. Tallis been really the lady of the manor and Abel an actual hurdle-maker still the reason offended every generous instinct on the part of one who had studied the whole art of love as taught by the circulating library of Eastington.

It was the sting of injustice far more than of disappointment that made the gathering tears brim over. She was longing to say, "I want nothing—only to let you feel how unkind and unjust you have been. I cannot be false to a man who has done all this for my sake, but I am your loving child, however you may punish me for doing right. Punish me if you like—only not by thinking that I think of gaining anything by losing you." But that same sense of injustice, when first roused, deadens the heart into silence, and Milly had never been unjustly treated in her life before.

She turned away her head and dried her eyes without being able to say a word.

"Come, Milly. Don't be so contrary. You must submit to be thought for by your elders and wisers. Just think what Mr. Adams would say"—

"Mr. Adams!" exclaimed Milly, in what sounded like, but was not, a tone of rebellious temper. So it sounded even to herself: and no sooner was it out, than she repented. "Oh aunt, can't you understand? As if I'd do for Mr. Adams or anybody what I cannot do for you! What is Mr. Adams? He's no more to me than that chair—less indeed."

"Then I'm to consider myself considerably sat upon, I suppose?" said a well-known voice from the door. "Well—I won't mind a bit so long as you use me for a *arm*-chair. Rather like it, Miss Milly, and make you as comfortable as I can. Good morning, Mrs. Tallis. Little domestic rumpus, eh?"

Since Mr. Adams had emerged from the chrysalis state of his articles and developed into a full practising butterfly he had slightly modified the gorgeousness of his apparel.

He had endeavoured to combine the attributes of a dashing young fellow with an air of professional dignity, and had, as usual, succeeded in giving much satisfaction to his own eyes. Instead of adopting the rainbow for his fashion-book he had harmonised himself into what is now termed a symphony in blacks and whites, only relieved from monotony by a scarlet silk neck-tie and a large yellow crocus in his button-hole.

"I don't comprehend legal expressions," said Mrs. Tallis, stiffly. "Milly is a little obstinate this morning—that's all."

"Perhaps as *amicus curiæ*"—*ammycus*, he called it—"as friend of the family that is, ladies—I might bring things round? Though 'twould be a crying shame, on my word of honour, to make Miss Milly smile when she looks so well with the fountains playing. If I was a poet, like our friend the schoolmaster, I'd dash off a ode, or a epic, or a idle, to the weeping Venus—and I would, too, only in our profession, you see, one has to think of

Pluto first and Cupid after. Eh, Miss Milly?"

Milly turned her back upon him and went to the window, for the art of warming up the cold shoulder was unknown in Winbury. But Mrs. Tallis had taken the young man at his own valuation. As a strait-laced elderly spinster she had a natural affinity with a young man who rattled on without regard to her laces: his scholarship impressed her, as belonging to the unknown regions above her, and his unrecognised slang no less, as belonging to regions which, though not above her, were equally unknown. To her mind he was the brilliant wit, the fine gentleman, the great lawyer, and the experienced man of the world that he was to his own.

"Never mind what Milly thinks," she said. "Milly is not in the humour to be talked to. Would you believe it, Mr. Adams?"

"Anything *you* say, ma'am. *Credat Judeus Apollo*, as the ancients used to say."

"The child has actually got herself engaged!"

"Engaged—to be married? No—don't say that, Mrs. Tallis!"

"There, Milly"—

"It's true, then? Then you see before you a broken-hearted attorney! Yes, ma'am—we have hearts in our profession, though you mightn't think it: we have indeed. As soon as we've got through our bit of business and I've had a mouthful of bread and cheese I'll go and drown myself in the canal. I had hoped—but no matter. Who is the happy man?"

"There you see, Milly. It doesn't enter Mr. Adams's head that you could have lowered yourself so far. He would not joke about it like that if"—

"No joke, I assure you, ma'am! What's jest to another is death to me."

"Like that, if he did not think you had made a choice of which your friends could approve."

"Aunt!" cried out Milly, losing her temper at last, "How can you talk so before a stranger? It's nothing to Mr. Adams—it's nothing to anybody at all."

"Good gracious! Is that how you have learned to speak to me? It is everything to Mr. Adams, as you would have known by this time if you had shown yourself fit to have things explained to you."

"I can't help it—I can't help feeling when—not that I mind about Mr. Adams, I'm sure. But first you treat me as if I was ungrateful, and then as if I was sullen, and you don't understand"——

It was terribly unfortunate that Mr. Adams should have chosen such a moment for his call. In his presence Mrs. Tallis was bound to keep up her dignity and assert her authority, while Milly was tongue-tied. Her aunt, she knew well enough, knew nothing about feelings and sentiments; but to drag her heart's confidence, with all its freshness still upon it, into the flaring light of Mr. Adams's

vulgar and flippant ridicule looked almost like deliberate cruelty. Of course it was nothing of the sort—Mrs. Tallis was only following the example of many wiser people in treating what she considered a child's folly by a short course of shame and sharp words. Her only mistake was that Milly did not consider her first love folly nor herself a child, nor Mr. Adams as entitled to be made the means of her humiliation. Understanding as little as she was understood and feeling herself on the verge of open rebellion, she went towards the door. But Mr. Adams placed himself before her.

"Come, Miss Milly," he said. "Don't be so hard on a fellow. I'm your legal adviser, you know."

She let her arms drop by her sides in despair.

"Aunt may say what she likes," she said. "I'll ask your advice when I want it. Will you let me go by?"

"Oh, certainly, Miss Milly—certainly; by

all means," and he threw open the door with a flourish and a bow. "Dear me—I didn't think it was in her. I hope the happy man keeps a bit of a temper, ma'am, somewhere about him? But it don't matter—if he runs short in the article there'll be enough in the house for two. It's a pity though: a sad pity. Love might muddle things sadly. Who is the happy man? Or the unhappy man, as the case may be? You haven't dropped such a thing as a hint anywhere about, have you, ma'am? There's such a lot of adventuring fellows about that would be down on Miss Milly like wasps about a treacle tub"—

Milly heard his tongue still running on till she reached her bedroom and bolted out the sound.

What could her aunt mean? She only succeeded in realising the situation to find it pass her powers of guessing. The unexplained hints let drop by Mrs. Tallis that there were special reasons against her engagement to Abel had fallen idly upon a

mind preoccupied with the romantic aspect of the question. Like every girl that ever was born, she prided herself upon understanding her elderly relations better than they understood her. But she had to own herself fairly at fault this time.

She felt like a tragedy queen in a novel: and, in spite of her natural sincerity, the sensation was not altogether disagreeable. The parts were all duly laid out. There was herself for the heroine. Abel for the hero, Mrs. Tallis for that much-abused aunt, uncle, father, or mother, who has for so many generations been held up to public scorn for sensibly objecting to foolish matches. The *rôle* of villain, for want of a more serious actor, must fall to Mr. Adams—he was at any rate an attorney. If Mrs. Tallis had only known how much true love depends for its very existence upon the roughness of its course she would most assuredly have taken very different measures to stop its farther progress. As Milly herself

had said, "To be engaged is the great thing:" and if Abel had been the exact opposite of himself it would have made but little difference to her. She would have been content to wait for him any number of years without thinking the time long. But now things were changed. She informed herself that she loved him passionately, and that no force of cold, conventional common sense should ever make her false to her heart's plighted word. She took his letter and kissed its carefully crossed t's and accurately dotted i's, as if each letter was a pearl, at least twenty times. She must answer it at once—but how?

She had never yet written a love-letter. This was not, indeed, because she had never received one, for such specimens of English composition were not altogether excluded from the *curriculum* at Miss Baxter's. A blank page torn out of a copy-book, illustrated with blots for not always intentional kisses, had every now and then found its

way from the college school over Miss Baxter's wall, more especially at the season when her plums and peaches were ripening. But Milly, even at the age of innocence, had never answered such things. She hated boys in the abstract, and was under the absolute dominion of a bosom friend who confiscated all such acts of homage as her own of right, whether they were addressed to her or no. And now, with all her inexperience, she was suddenly called upon to produce a masterpiece under circumstances that would have puzzled the author of the "Complete Letter-Writer." She was proud of her task, and even of its difficulties; but, all the same, she did not know how to begin.

She laid out a sheet of paper before her, dipped her pen in the ink, and waited for an inspiration. It would be sure to come, she thought—everybody in love can write a love-letter, so why should not she? Of course it must be written in the very best authorised style. There are people, it is said, who in the

very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of passion acquire and beget a temperance that may give it a good appearance in a court of law. Such was not Milly's thought, but she wished to produce something that she would like her old school-fellows to see. How did that famous letter begin that her friend had written to the doctor's assistant on the other side of the street? Milly and half a dozen other girls had been allowed to read that letter under the seal of the strictest confidence, and it had thrilled them with its romantic eloquence. Somehow, however, its phrases had passed out of her mind: she could only remember that the doctor's assistant was somewhere in the course of it called "angel," and the term, which she then thought elegant, now struck her as a little absurd. She could not bring herself to call Abel an angel: indeed she was not quite sure that she thought him one. "I wonder," she asked herself, desperately, "if

Julia really thought the doctor's boy an angel, or if it's only the right thing to say? I wish she was here."

Ashamed of her failure to rise to the occasion she sat biting her pen when she heard a hand upon the handle of her bolted door.

"Milly?" asked her aunt, "Are you there? What are you doing? Mr. Adams wants some beer."

"I'm writing to Abel, aunt," said Milly, boldly.

"Then let me in, if you please. Whoever you're writing to, you needn't shut yourself up. There—now show me the letter."

"Aunt!"

"Good gracious! Whatever has come to the girl! You were ready enough to show me young Herrick's letter to you. How long have girls taken to writing to young men without showing their aunts, I should like to know? It usedn't to be so in

my time. Come — let me see it instantly.”

Milly, in spite of her agitation, could not refrain from a smile as her aunt slowly adjusted her spectacles and brought all her attention to bear upon a large round blot in the middle of a blank sheet of paper.

CHAPTER XII.

First Sentinel. Hola ! Who goes there ?

Andreas. A Friend.

First Sentinel. Stand, friend, and give the word.

A Voice. Sleep !

From the dream-land by the sea

Rise a mist 'twixt him and thee !

Be he friend or be he foe,

Dream, and sleep, and let him go.

First Sentinel. Pass, friend—All's well.

“WHY, what in heaven is this ?” asked Mrs. Tallis, looking from the unwritten letter to Milly. She had never heard of Rosina and Don Bartolo, so it did not strike her that her straightforward Milly might have been taking a leaf out of that chapter of deception which forms so large a portion of

the book of love, as it is read in Milly's school.

"That's the letter, aunt," said Milly, blushing. Then a sudden impulse came upon her, and she threw her arms round the old lady's neck once more. "Yes, and that shall be all the letter, if you like—now Mr. Adams isn't by."

"That's all very fine, Milly," said Mrs. Tallis with the extra stiffness that she always put on when she was the most moved. "But fine words butter no—I mean, it's easy talking. Do you mean to give up the young man? If you do, you must tell him so. That's but fair."

"No, aunt," answered Milly in a low voice. "That can't be. You can't ask me to go back from my word."

"Nonsense. It's lawful to change 'I will' into 'I won't' even when the parson asks you."

"It would make him so unhappy!"

"Stuff. We've all got things to put up

with, and who's he, to be thought of more than others that deserve better, may be? Nobody ever thought of being so tender with me, and I'm none the worse for it."

"But me, aunt—it would make me so unhappy too! Don't you know what always happens when people mustn't marry? They pine away into a slow consumption, and the man goes off to the wars and gets killed. That's always the ending—and then, when it's too late, their friends are sorry for what they've done," said Milly, mournfully reveling in the desolate picture she had drawn. "Abel once talked of going for a soldier—please, aunt, let us be engaged properly, and I'll promise to wait for him twenty years."

"Stuff and nonsense. There's no more chance of your going into a consumption than of Abel's being killed. There's no war: and I shall see that you eat your meals properly while there's a butcher in Winbury." But she looked anxiously at Milly all the same.

Milly felt that her threat of going into a decline on the spot had told. She had no desire to press her advantage unduly, but she could not help adding, with a sigh,

“Well, aunt—I’ll do my very best, but one can’t be expected to eat very much when somebody is breaking his heart for one. There—Mr. Adams isn’t here now. So I’ll beg your pardon for being cross, only”——

“Why, whatever has come to the girl now? Of course you were cross—and of course I was angry. It was my place to be. But there. Come down now and draw Mr. Adams his beer.”

Milly put up her desk with the air of a martyr, all the more marked, it may be, to compensate for the immediate relief from her task that had proved so disgracefully difficult. Like a martyr also she tapped the beer-barrel, and then sat down with Mr. Adams and her aunt before cold meat in the housekeeper’s room. The young lawyer showed no recollec-

tion of having been snubbed—indeed it was unlikely that he had noticed it even at the time, so little was the possibility of being snubbed included in his imperturbable philosophy. Had Milly gone so far as to box his ears, as she had been strongly inclined to do, he would have borne no malice for what he would have regarded as a compliment in disguise. He helped himself liberally to beef and pickles, and nodded at Milly with aggravating good humour as she filled his glass, perversely pouring low so that his draught might be as flat as possible.

Mrs. Tallis piled Milly's plate, as if beef were the recognised remedy for heart sickness. Nor was the supply unwelcome, for Milly had a very constant and healthy appetite, which the excitement of the morning had by no means taken away. But alas! *noblesse oblige*. She was an ill-used heroine of romance. She felt her aunt's eyes upon her fork, and who ever heard of the heroine of a love story

eating slices of cold beef and drinking beer ?

While she fasted in the midst of plenty, Mr. Adams, with his mouth full, rattled out all the gossip of Eastington. She was interested, as one familiar name after another became the peg for some piece of good-humoured back-biting : but the same spirit of the occasion compelled her to force her face into an expression of the saddest inattention. Who, again, ever heard of a heroine smiling at the jokes of the wittiest of young men, or showing interest in anything outside the circle of her own sorrows ? She rose from the table hungry, but on the whole not dissatisfied with the way in which she had behaved. Without any pretence, she was now as thoroughly uncomfortable as a love-lorn maid ought to be. But, as soon as Mr. Adams had driven off in his gig, Mrs. Tallis, while clearing the table, said in a sharp tone of despair,

“ Go and finish your letter, Milly. Any-

thing's better than your not eating your meals."

It was the same tone to a shade in which she had said, "My spectacles? There they are then, if you must have something," some twenty years ago, when Abel for the first time drew upon himself the attention of Winbury. The words were not gracious in themselves, but the spoiled girl knew her spoiler well enough to know by this time that the fullness of her aunt's indulgence was invariably to be measured by the coldness with which it was given: her summer-weather showed itself in frowns and cold shades. The cloud melted from Milly's face under the influence of a ray of sunshine that tried to pass for the east wind, and for the third time she threw her arms round her aunt's neck.

"Oh, aunt," she began, "do you really mean"—

"There—do what you like. Only if anything goes wrong, don't blame me."

"Nothing shall ever go wrong—you shall be as happy as I am, and I will always do what you like as long as I live."

"Ah, that's easy to promise, when young people marry and old people die. I only want one piece of obedience now, Milly,—that you won't marry till—till—how's one to tell till when? I don't want to leave you without knowing what's to become of you"——

She stopped and considered. Why, thought Milly, would she keep on harping on the hateful subject of her own death, which, in spite of her years, looked as far off as Milly's own? No doubt Mr. Adams had been there to make her will, and no doubt a will is a sort of self-signed death warrant to nine minds out of ten. But that was no reason for mixing up the tolling of a funeral knell with wedding-chimes.

"I won't marry for twenty years, aunt," said Milly impulsively, "and not then if you won't give me away." And she was in

earnest, for all that she was in love to fasting-point, and that twenty years is a long test for the most patient lover.

"Promise me you won't marry for three whole years without my leave, or without Mr. Adams's if anything happens to me."

"Mr. Adams!" exclaimed Milly, astonished out of every other thought, as well she might be.

"Mr. Adams. You would have known why if you had listened to me this morning, but I'm glad you didn't now. Mr. Adams is a sensible young man, and who understands all the circumstances. You've promised, mind — whatever happens you won't marry Mr. Herrick, or anybody else, without leave for three years."

Not even Milly's ignorance of business and revolt against the melancholy vein that her aunt persisted in indulging could prevent her seeing the grotesque aspect of such a choice of a guardian for a girl. If humour lies in incongruity of ideas, Mrs. Tallis had

unconsciously invented a joke of the very first order. Being unable to laugh, however, she could only repeat "Mr. Adams!" and stare at the vista of indefinite absurdities that might arise from making the marriage of a man like Abel Herrick depend even for a day upon the will of one who would be pretty sure to turn such a guardianship into a machine for the manufacture of fun. The library of Eastington had supplied her with pictures of guardians as well as of heroines, and they in no way resembled Mr. Adams. It was somehow easier to imagine a heroine at dinner than her guardian with a scarlet neck-tie and a snub nose. Abel himself was hardly more bewildered by the difference between the real world and its pen-and-ink sketches than she.

However, the promise was ratified by the assent of silence, and her relations with her aunt were restored to their natural conditions of inner warmth and outward coldness. Mrs. Tallis, when she saw the loaf lessen at tea-

time, almost lost her last shadow of objection to what she chose to consider a *mésalliance* between a scholar of St. Kit's and a joiner's daughter in her relief from the worse fear that had been suggested by Milly's threat of atrophy.

"Have you written that letter yet, Milly?" she asked suddenly and without preface, in her very sharpest and therefore very kindest tone.

"Well—not yet, aunt. It isn't so easy to know exactly what to say. One can't write just an every-day sort of letter, and it does seem such nonsense somehow when I try to write as one ought to a clever man."

"Nonsense, Milly—and you fresh from Miss Baxter's! Why I'm sure you write a hand fit for any young lady in the land. Much better than the young man with all his cleverness—in that letter you showed me he made his up-strokes just like mop-handles, and he a schoolmaster."

"But you see letters have to be made

of something more than pot-hooks and hangers"—

"Have they? They usedn't to when I was a girl. However, as you haven't written, you may as well see that his things are sent off to him by the carrier. That will never occur to Mrs. Herrick, you may be sure. And you needn't say anything about the money I lent him."

This reduction of the whole question to a question of thoughtful housewifery was a pledge of perfect reconciliation, and as such Milly accepted it. She did begin her letter at last, and by the time the box was packed and the carrier called it was ready to be sent to Cambridge. How and when it was received is now a matter of history.

But of that Milly, happily for herself, knew nothing. Her sole misgiving was that it fell short of what the poet and scholar would expect from his future wife: that it would read laboured, cold, and tame. But for the

rest she drew a pleasant picture of its interrupting Abel's work with a note of encouragement from his old home and from the heart that he had left there. If she could only have seen how it was actually received in the very moment of failure by the man who had failed, and who had not the courage to exchange her note of praise for the sweeter and deeper note of comfort at its close! No doubt she was carried away by the triumph of her lover, and believed she loved him the better because she was proud of his success, and prouder still that he had ascribed it all to her. But the truest word in all her letter was that wherewith she had told him how warm would have been his welcome had he failed. That, almost alone, had run without effort from her pen. For although her notions of love and marriage were childish enough, she herself was a woman in all things — it was only her knowledge, and not her heart, that needed time to grow. Had Abel only answered her

letter frankly he need have had no fear for her reply.

But that is nothing but another chapter of the book of If, which teaches the somewhat barren lesson that things would be different if they were not as they are. And so things fell back quietly into their old groove once more. Winbury had but just turned round like the sluggard and gone to sleep again. Mr. Adams's business remained unexplained. Mrs. Tallis never alluded to it afterwards, nor, after seeing the box properly packed and corded, did she mention Abel's name. Milly estimated this silence at its probable value of nothing, and spent some days in the conscious pride of not only being an engaged young lady, but of having experienced the roughness of true love upon which the zest and savour of its course are supposed to depend by people who are still young enough to enjoy being unhappy.

Abel, though he had lost his scholarship, ought to have been the happiest of men: though, on the whole, it might have been more satisfactory to fill the thoughts of a girl who had something better than nothing wherewith to fill her time.

Only one thing was wanting to content her—the honour and glory to which every girl has a recognised right when she is first engaged. It was a thousand pities that Winbury was so small a world, and that Eastington was so far away—nearly a dozen miles. There was positively nobody, not even her school friend Julia, to wonder what any young man could have seen in such a girl. Envy passed her by, for want of enviers: and without being a little envied, what was the good of being engaged? Perhaps this solitary mote in the sunbeam had something to do with it, but by-and-by she began to discover that to be an engaged young lady is not everything in the world. Nobody can feel one emotion, whether it be

love or hate, at an equal intensity for every moment of every day—there must have been some stray moments in the year when even Mr. Adams thought less of himself than during the remaining seconds, minutes, and hours. And so Milly, though she did her best to keep herself strung to a proper pitch of elevation, discovered for herself and by herself the great original truth that the lessons of the Eastington library were a rather one-sided affair. I do not mean that she was afflicted with any of the wild and burning desires for a life beyond that of mere womanhood that tormented her unknown sister-woman, Miss Beatrice Deane. Her longing for something to do was equally hindered by circumstances from development, but then it was strictly bounded by a desire to help her aunt in scrubbing the floors. It was simply that the days turned into weeks, and Abel's first still remained his only love-letter.

At first, one was enough. Then when she had read it for the hundredth time she

began to make excuses—her lover had no time to write, or was waiting till he could tell her of the attainment of some yet loftier pinnacle of glory. But such an excuse was necessarily put out of court by a ten days' silence. Yet some good reason, consistent with the attributes of true love, there must surely be. Some girls would have leapt to the conclusion that Abel was ill; some that he was faithless; some that absence had made him cold; some that the last letter had offended him. From the fact that Milly thought none of these things, but persisted in trusting implicitly to his health and constancy, I am unable to draw any conclusion. Perhaps she unconsciously judged the hearts and bodies of others by her own; she, at any rate, was never ill, and not even the occasional visits of Mr. Adams to the Manor House made a single thought for one moment swerve.

Nevertheless the days began to drag heavily. She began to dream at night,

and her appetite began really to fail her — not that Mrs. Tallis noticed it, for she was now as careful to hide the absence as she had before been careful to cover the presence of hunger. Since her aunt had given up a prejudice to please her, she could surely manage to get through her breakfast bravely in order to gratify her aunt in return. The great difficulty was to know what to do with herself and her hands and her thoughts between breakfast and bed-time. The man from Mrs. Brown's Post Office was at best a sinecurist, but he seemed to avoid the Manor House as if he owed it a grudge, and Milly felt like an injured person towards Mrs. Brown—she wanted to lay the blame of Abel's silence upon any but the right shoulders. She had been shy in writing twice in answer to his once, but she summoned up courage at last to plunge into a letter, though it gave her ten times as much trouble as the first, and though she had no definite intention of

posting it even if she ever succeeded in bringing it to an end.

“My dear Abel,” she began, not being yet practised in the use of the superlative degree. And then how was she to continue? She might ignore his silence and content herself with telling the news of Winbury—but alas, Winbury had no news to tell: at least, none that would serve as an excuse for writing so suddenly after so long a silence. The days had followed one another so monotonously that even she was not aware till to-day how long that silence had been. Where there is no change, there is no such thing as time. Since she had last written, the weeks had been one immensely long to-day. The weeks, indeed! When she had last written the trees were bare of leaves, and still they were almost bare. But even I, thinking of Milly Barnes, and not of what was happening out of doors, have failed to notice that they were bare then because the leaves had not yet come, but

were bare now because the leaves had almost gone away again. March, April, May, June, July, August, and September were the events that had happened in Winbury while Milly was waiting to hear from Abel. Milly in the Manor House was rivaling Mariana. Had she passed all these months in a town, if only in Eastington, had she been able to compare her passive vegetation with the simplest form of changing life, it must have been borne in upon her long ago that something had changed in the life of Abel. As it was, she argued, though without knowing it, "Nothing has changed with anybody, because nothing has changed with me." Nevertheless, while she wrote "My dear Abel," for the second time with the same pen—for with that also time had stood still—the long, monotonous to-day suddenly resolved itself before her into a gulf of time. She was dismayed to realise at last that she had waited for the postman from March till October.

"I suppose," she went on, "you are very hard at work, and that is why you have not written to us. I am not hard at work, so perhaps the time seems rather long to me. Aunt thinks you write, I know, though she does not say so, and I have been tempted sometimes to tell a story and say you do, just to prevent her thinking that I am acting one in saying nothing. There—don't think I am a worry and a scold, but I should like one line to tell me you don't, and if you would like me to write sometimes, for really I have nothing else to do. But I suppose I ought not to wonder at your having no time to write to me when Mrs. Herrick has heard from you just as little. 'Ah miss,' she said to me only the other day, 'our Abel isn't our Abel no more now—'t isn't likely a grand gentleman would want to saddle himself with an old washerwoman and her eight children, and I'm not going to ask him to, not I.' Please don't let her think that, Abel—I don't think

it, of course, but then she doesn't know you as well as I. Would you like to do something to please me very much indeed? More than if you write to my own self? Write a nice letter to aunt, and tell her all you are doing, and ask her right out for me. She is just as if she was my own mother, you know, and oughtn't to be put in the background, and she has been so good—I can't tell you how good till I see you again. I should be so happy if you would do that, and you need not say a word more than what I have told you. Mrs. Herrick and all are very well—I go there most days when she doesn't come here. Of course I have not anything to tell you. I spend all my time in sewing, walking, and dusting the books, which are the only things aunt will ever let me do. What a dreadfully stupid letter I am writing—not a bit what I wanted to. I should like to write something that would make you feel happier than you would be without it,

and I am doing nothing but complain. Of course I am really quite happy: I only want to know that you are too, and not to let aunt think that I am hiding things from her when there is nothing to hide. Is your great poem nearly finished yet? For I suppose that is what takes up all your time, and of course I know that poets can't be expected to be always writing letters to girls. I wonder what made you care for such a stupid one as me. Perhaps if you would write I should know better what to say, and how to say it. I suppose there is no chance of your being able to come to Winbury yet awhile? Well, I can wait for that, but never writing doesn't seem like our being engaged at all. Good-bye now, dear Abel.

"Your ever affectionate MILLY."

This is probably the coldest love-letter on record, considering that it represented the result of a nine months' engagement, un-

clouded by a shadow of doubt or misunderstanding. Possibly its emptiness was a mark of its honesty, for Milly, while painfully conscious of its coldness, was obliged to admit with shame that she had written everything that she had to say. She could hardly bring herself to post it, but as something had to be done, and as she had done her very best, she hurried on her bonnet and shawl before timidity could quite overcome her and set off to put her letter into the box at once, steeling herself against repentance by the way. She had directed the letter "A. Herrick, Esq., St. Christopher's College, Cambridge," so that on the whole she might have spared herself the pains.

Having despatched it to the cemetery of dead letters, without even a date that might guide its ghost back to her, she, instead of going back to the old Manor House, fell into an aimless walk along the towing path that ran by the canal. It was not a

pleasant afternoon for out of doors, but it seemed to be in accord with her mood. Winbury is always blank and sad, even in summer: but it is in the mists of an autumn sunset that it shows how blank and sad a place may be. Its dykes and canals breathe out a grey vapour that feels like wet wool, and induces moral ague. Elsewhere, the season of the fall of the leaf is Nature's pathos: at Winbury, it is Nature's *ennui*. When Milly began her walk the well-known blur of fog was just rising, and helping her to feel, in spite of her youth and health, that life, in its blankness and sadness, was very like Winbury. Nature is sympathetic, they say: but they mean that we are sympathetic with her. She did not ask herself, but she felt, What was the use of Milly Barnes? If she had actually put the question to herself she would have answered it easily, and in the words of the Church Catechism that relate to duty. But she was not catechising herself—she was only taking

an aimless walk in a fog along a canal. What was the use of oneself, or of anything, was the very atmosphere that she was breathing. The use of the leaves that are born only to wither, of rooms that are swept only to become dusty again, of love that comes only to leave the heart empty, was all contained in one question that the fog asked and that she could not answer. The doubts and dreams are dim that come at such a time, but fighting with phantoms is proverbially a losing game. She was not given to feelings of despondency or to any other morbid moods, but then she was not in the habit of taking her walks in such a season at such an hour, and the mist seemed to surround her with a presage of coming evil. And what ought to be evil to her that was not connected with Abel?

Had she been wise, she would have walked briskly back and warmed her thoughts by the fire, whose glow, by force of contrast, turns every out-of-door evil into a direct

source of comfort. But some new spirit had come to disturb her in her dreamy peace, and drove her away from the home comforts that had grown so stale. There are times and seasons in life, as in its type the year, when—it is hard to express how—the whole atmosphere seems to stand at zero. Everything that is past seems to be blotted out, the present is a blank, and no change seems to be possible.

But it is precisely at such seasons that the great changes come; and then the empty space before the change is called a presentiment—the recoil before the wave, the lull before the storm. Milly's canvas was now so empty that it seemed impossible for any sort of picture to be ever written thereon. But suddenly, through the mist in front, she was aware of a presence that made one portion of the air seem blacker and thicker: and in another minute she found the narrow towing-path blocked up by the substance of the advancing

shadow. It came into sight piece-meal; for the mist was now so thick as to form what looked like a solid grey wall a few yards before her. But, alas for the credit of presentiments, it was not much when it came. First came the rough head that had some pretensions to be that of a mastiff. Then the body of a lurcher; then the stump of a tail—three parts of three separate dogs that together made up but one. But the animal did not approach her with the gait of a dog who runs along a canal by the side of a barge. His legs moved as if running, but made little way, and he panted and rolled out his tongue as if it were the height of the dog-days instead of the depth of autumn. Gradually his efforts were accounted for by the appearance of a truck, to which he was harnessed by straps in defiance of the law that exempts his race from being degraded into beasts of burden. And then it appeared that the dog had a shadow thrown behind him on the wall of

mist, but of a different shape from his own; and this singularity was not yet accounted for.

“Hold hard, there—don’t run down my shop, if *you* please.—There’s room in this here world for us all, so long as one don’t mind going to the wall. Hulloo, miss—I beg your pardon—I thought ’twas a barge coming. They’re a rough lot of customers are the bargees, and would think nothing of roping a tradesman and all his stock into the canal sooner than they’d get out of his way. But that’s the way of the world, miss, and it’s no use to grumble. Live and let live, say I.”

It was the dog’s shadow that spoke: and it suddenly occurred to Milly that the towing-path on a dark afternoon contained other perils than a fit of blue devils and the chance of catching cold. If she did not admire the dog, still less did she admire the sound of the shadow. The words were not threatening, but their tone was unplea-

santly familiar, and she drew herself to the side of the path 'in order to allow the speaker to pass without further conversation. She did not recognise the voice, and a half year's unbroken residence in Winbury had given her the local distrust of strangers.

But the man did not seem inclined to let her escape without the benefit of a few more scraps of his wisdom. He stopped the truck, and allowed the dog to rest himself by lying down to pant at ease in the pathway. "It's a dark, damp, raw, woolly-feeling sort of an evening, miss," he said thoughtfully. "And this is a lonesome sort of place, too. If you'd take an honest man's advice, miss, you'd keep to the main road. This aren't no manner of place for an unprotected female."

"Thank you," said Milly a little nervously, "I am quite safe, and know the way. Will you kindly let me pass by?"

"There now—if I didn't know you was a real lady! How time does change—I mind

when there was no such thing as a lady in all Winbury. But as for safe—pr'aps you could tell me what's o'clock, miss, if you'd be so kind? My gold repeating chronometer hasn't come from the maker's yet, miss, or I wouldn't trouble you."

Certainly the place was lonely, and Milly was in no courageous mood. She tried to pass on, affecting not to hear; but she was practically surrounded. She stood between the canal and the hedge, with the man in front and the dog behind. So she could do nothing but pull out the gold watch that her aunt had given her as a birthday present that she might not be behind the other young ladies at Miss Baxter's, and thus found to her dismay that she had walked not only beyond the limits of prudence, but beyond tea-time also.

"A pretty watch that, miss. If I was you I wouldn't be so bold to show it out on a lonesome tow-path to the first stranger that might ask the time of day. I'm a honest

tradesman, I am ; but it's because I haven't got my diamonds with me I venture on a short cut like this one here. They're a rough lot, those bargees, and I wouldn't wonder if you'd find a many young women that once had watches if you'd amuse a odd hour or so by dragging that canal. Ah, I could make your flesh crawl on your bones if I was to tell you some of the things I've known about dark days and lonesome ways. You see, miss, if I wasn't a honest sort of a chap I could have you stripped as clean as a whistle, and under water as safe as the Bank of England before you knew where you were. But lord, miss, don't you be afraid of me. I only want to drink your health, miss, when I get to Westcote, and thankye kindly. There aren't so much honesty about that it should be let go thirsty."

Milly's heart began to beat, and she was not altogether inclined to prefer the company of the honest tradesman to that of the bargees. She knew perfectly well that if she

ever told her adventure afterwards she would be laughed at for a coward; but the fog, the water, the dog, the half-invisible man, and the depression of her own spirits, made a disagreeable combination. "Good evening," she said, as stoutly as she could, and made another attempt to pass on.

"Well now—blowed if that isn't what I call gratitude!" exclaimed the tinker, in a sad and injured tone. "I go for to protect a young female from a lot of bargees, and she don't say so much as thankye. I think the least thing a real lady could do for a chap that don't take her gold watch when he has the chance would be to give him a half-a-crownd. But if half-crownds are scarce I'm not above shillings, not I. But there, I'll never trouble myself to behave like a gentleman again."

Milly looked timidly up and down the path, but nobody was to be seen within the circle that the fog left visible. She felt in her purse with trembling fingers, and managed to find

the smallest sum that would content this philosopher of the highway. "There, then," she said, hurriedly letting a shilling drop into his outstretched hand, "Let me by, please. I've got nothing more."

"Thankye, ma'am. I thought you wouldn't turn out a bad sort after all. But holloa! What's this here? Here's a do! No, ma'am, you won't pass till we've settled this here. And this here's a bad 'un—and that I call a shame, to try and do a poor man."

"I'm very sorry," stammered Milly, "I didn't mean"——

"Passing bad money's again the law," he said, shaking his head sternly. "There's some that wouldn't let you off so easy. No, miss: I won't give you back the bad 'un, or you'll be trying to do some other poor tradesman that don't join sharpness to honesty. What'd you say if somebody gave you a thousand pound note, and went to put things right by begging your pardon? I'll bore a hole in the rim for a keepsake, and you'll let

me help myself this time—I want to do what’s fair.”

He advanced as if to lay hands on her : she shrank back into the hedge, that she might take out her watch and purse and give them up to him without feeling the touch of his hands. A wave of mist was blown between them by the rising wind, and the tinker came yet nearer to prevent her taking advantage of the increasing darkness by running away. He reached out his arm. But, instead of meeting with the touch of gold or silver, he found his wrist grasped in what felt like an iron vice. Milly looked up at his exclamation, and suddenly the wave of mist had turned into the figure of a tall young man, who stood between her and the tinker.

Abel at last ! Her presentiment was indeed fulfilled.

“I’m very glad to hear that,” said the embodiment of the mist in a strong, frank voice—which was not Abel’s. “Fair play’s a jewel. What’s all this about, eh ?”

"What's all this about?" growled the tinker: "I'm a martyr to the rheumatics—that's what it's about: and your fingers grip, sir."

"A martyr, are you? Then you must be a martyr a little longer," said the stranger. "And to what were you going to help yourself?"

"To a luxury, sir—a luxury: of giving a young lady a blessing for going to be charitable to a rheumatical old tradesman. May-be your honour would like to earn a blessing too? I've been a parish clerk in my time, sir, so I can do it well."

"What did she give you?"

"A very bad bob, sir. But she was going to give me a good 'un, bless her, for saving her watch from those brutes of bargees. Forewarned is forearmed, as no doubt your honour knows."

"Very well. Then now you'll give it to me, for saving from you what you saved from the bargees. Out with it"—

"Oh, never mind that, sir," said Milly, thinking of nothing but how to escape from both of them. "I only want to get home"——

"Out with it!" said the young man, not attending to her. "I thought so—as good a shilling as can be. And now what shall I give you? Let me see—you look as if you want washing, and there's the canal handy. But then I might have to help you out again—so on the whole I think I'll give you a kick and let you go."

"Thankye, sir—thankye! I should very much prefer the kick, if *you* please."

His choice was made in such humble good faith, and with such freedom from the smallest shade of impudence, that the young man could not help a burst of good-humoured laughter that seemed to break the unwholesome fog as the tinker placed himself in a convenient attitude for receiving a kick, so that the donor might have the smallest possible amount of trouble. "There, then,

be off with you," said the young man, without performing his promise, while the tinker whistled to his dog and slouched away. "And now," he said to Milly, "the sooner you leave this for the road the better. Are you going far?"

"Only back to Winbury," said Milly, seized with a shy fit. "Oh, sir, I am so sorry"——

"That I didn't kick that fellow? Never mind—somebody else will, never fear."

"That you should have had so much trouble—it was so good and brave of you"——

"Not a bit. Why the fellow positively asked me to kick him. Who is he?"

Milly was wondering who her rescuer could possibly be. Not only was he that unknown creature in Winbury, a stranger, but he seemed to have been produced from the fog solely for her protection from what she now magnified into probable murder. He saw two things in the darkness—that she was

dressed like a lady, and was trembling all over. "Then I'll see you to Winbury," he said, "if you don't mind. I'm going there too. You needn't be afraid of me, anyhow. If you live at Winbury of course you know my uncle—the Vicar?"

"Yes," said Milly, still more shyly, for to be related to the Vicar was in itself a proof that the stranger belonged to another and an unknown world. What the other was like in face, neither as yet could tell.

"Then," said the very substantial phantom who was walking by her side, proud of his adventure, slight as it had been, and himself a little shy, "as we shall be sure to become acquainted so soon, hadn't we better get the introduction over? My name's Eliot."

"And mine is Milly Barnes."

CHAPTER XIII.

Whate'er is lost, whate'er is hid,
Some answering touch is formed to find:
Some sudden trembling of the wind
Will whisper up the closed lid.


There is no lock without its key,
There is no heart without its gate,
Nor any secret cave of Fate
Without its grain of Sesame.

INTRODUCTIONS were not common enough in Milly's life to be mere matters of form. She could only dimly gather the outline of the young man's face through the fog, but she knew that he was a gentleman of a higher sort than the

highest in Eastington. It is common enough to mistake the sham for the real, but impossible to take the real for the sham. But it was not an evening to improve the introduction. A discussion concerning the tinkler and the fog brought them to the lodge gate, where Milly bade her companion good evening without adding an invitation to enter. Her aunt's hospitality had never been tested, and she did not care to try the experiment upon a stranger. Then, as fast as her feet could carry her, she hurried up the avenue, and prepared to receive a scolding for not being home to tea. But even in the matter of such an absolute certainty, this eventful day was fated to be made up from beginning to end of unexpected things. She did not receive the looked-for scolding, for the unprecedented reason that her aunt was not in the house to scold her.

Altogether, the old lady had of late shown a tendency to escape from her fixed orbit. It was not that she was less diligent in her

self-imposed martyrdom of work—that was impossible. Had she suddenly become a Queen, she would have swept the steps of her own throne and rubbed up her crown with her own hands. But ever since the battle over Abel's letter she had gone about as if burdened with a mystery, especially before and after the comings and goings of Mr. Adams. Milly did not leap to the conclusion, as an outsider might have done, that the old lady had suddenly eloped with the young lawyer, but she grew anxious to a point that to an outsider would have seemed absurd. To be out of doors after tea means little in itself, but it meant a great deal where Mrs. Tallis was concerned, and it was impossible to guess what it might or might not mean. What if the tinker, whom Milly now magnified into a very Dick Turpin, had met her in another lonely spot, and if no knight errant had suddenly emerged from the mist for her protection? Aunts are less favoured by



accident than nieces, when accident takes the shape of a tall and broad-shouldered young man. It was much too late for her to have gone out after Mrs. Herrick, with a view to some invisible mountain of work that loomed heavily over to-morrow. The kettle was singing on the hob, and the table comfortably laid: everything was just as usual, save for the absence of one of those sharp voices and frigid faces that are somehow missed more keenly than warm looks and soft tones. Milly, without taking off her bonnet or shawl, went to the window, drew aside the red curtains, and looked out into the mist that was now beginning to clear away before the rising moon. But the long blue cloak that she watched for never appeared.

At last, when full ten minutes by the clock, full sixty by her anxiety, had dragged by, and when she was on the point of running out into the mist again to take counsel with Mr. Pottinger the constable,

the kettle, not being watched, boiled over. In going to its help, her eye fell upon a scrap of paper pinned against the chimney-piece. "I have had," she read, forgetful of the kettle, "to go to Eastington. I shall be back the first thing to-morrow with the carrier. Don't touch a thing in the house. I've put out your tea for you, and the proper quantity in the pot, so you cannot do much harm. Mind and rake out the fire when you go to bed, and chain the door, and don't open it, whoever comes."

Mr. Adams again! For that the lawyer was at the bottom of this inexplicable journey she was sure. What could it all mean? A team of cart-horses was not strong enough to draw her aunt from the house to which Mr. Smith might come at any moment, and yet a word from Mr. Adams was stronger than her fears of fire, thieves, and the works of all hands but her own. How strange it would be if the unfortunate owner of the old Manor

House were to choose this inopportune moment for paying his first visit of inspection! No doubt it would just happen so on a day when everything seemed bound to go crossly. Or suppose not Mr. Smith, but the tinker himself, should find out that the old Manor House was left with no guardian but one solitary girl?

Crushed with her sense of responsibility she could not wait till bed-time before putting up the chain. But, as it grated in the staple, the thought came to her—What if the thieves had made an entry between her aunt's departure and her own return, and were hidden in the house even now? With such an idea in her head, it was impossible to sit down and spend a long solitary evening for the first time since she was born.

Any risk would be better than that. It would be better even to carry her flaring tallow candle through every room and passage, and to brave the ghosts of the

forgotten memories that such a house must needs contain. She made up her mind to this lesser evil, and persevered, though her heart came into her mouth whenever one of the gusts of wind that springs from nowhere in such houses made a window rattle or a door slam. Impelled by the fascination of panic she looked into every cupboard and threw her light over every shelf, nor did she take to her heels even when she found herself face to face with a mouse or a black beetle. The search for nothing reminded her of her old games of hide-and-seek with Abel, before the shadow of love had ever risen between them ; but now every nook and corner of the old house seemed changed. Into half the rooms of the huge rambling place she had never penetrated since those hide-and-seek days, and never, in her life by such a light and at such an hour.

After running the gauntlet of chair-covers turned into phantoms by the moonlight, of creaking boards and scrambling mice, she

at last reached the book-room, whose mouldy shelves had alone remained sacred from her aunt's broom. The events of this long and dismal day had made Milly forget the only piece of work she was allowed to do, and a few of the books were still lying about on the floor—the only blot upon the perfection of his house that Mr. Smith, in case he suddenly made his appearance, would be able to find. The sight was not altogether unwelcome: it was like meeting herself among the shadows. For the sake of doing something real at last, she sat down on the floor, placed her candle by her side, and began to restore the books to their places on the lowest shelf one by one. She made a desolate picture enough, as she sat alone by the guttering and flaring light among the ruins of the lumber of learning.

Suddenly, while handling one of the heaviest volumes, she started to her feet with a scream, letting the book fall with a crash upon the floor. A loud report jarred

through the house, and at the same moment her candle was blown out, leaving her in pitch darkness. It was as if not Mr. Smith but the Devil himself had invaded the old Manor House and was bent upon scaring her out of her senses.

Then, at last, she took to her heels, and raced down stairs, two steps at a time, till she reached the safety of the housekeeper's room, where the fire still burned and the kettle still sang. I fear she must be set down as only a coward after all. The crash was explained by the overturned tea table, and the cause by the cat, who, instead of crying over spilt milk, was lapping it up industriously from the floor.

Mrs. Tallis had not been so very wrong in holding that none but herself was able to keep things in order. Poor Milly was ready to cry with vexation at an accident that would brand her as untrustworthy for all the rest of her days. Far from following the illustrious example of Sir Isaac Newton,

she cuffed the cat's ears and locked her up in an empty cupboard.

"When will this wretched day ever end?" she sighed to herself as she cleared up the litter as well as she could. "I am the most miserable, unlucky girl that ever was born—Abel's forgotten me, and I've smashed the tea-things. But it's all of a piece, I suppose—I should like to sit down and die. That man had better have drowned me, after all. But I *will* finish putting up the books, all the same—I'll see if there isn't one thing I can make an end of. And I won't start again if all the house tumbles down. I don't care for anything, now that the best tea-pot's gone."

She lighted another candle, and returned resolutely to the cold and dreary book-room, which seemed to be the centre of the panics wherewith the whole house was filled. She found the book she had been on the point of replacing still lying open on the floor, face downwards and with

crumpled leaves. What new horror, if Mr. Smith should take it into his head to inspect this very volume, in order to judge of the condition of the others! In truth, such a thing was more than unlikely, seeing that Mr. Smith was a respectable but unlettered attorney, while the book in question was that very Hebrew Bible which Abel had opened but once and had then closed once for all, for want of a key to its mysteries. As Milly lifted it carefully with the back uppermost a number of loose pieces of paper fluttered down upon the floor.

That was the last straw. In her ignorance of all literary matters beyond Miss Baxter's circle, and in the awe with which she regarded this volume of mystery, she assumed that every scrap of paper must have its proper place among the printed leaves, to which it was certainly out of her power, without the help of magic, to restore them. She looked at one of them hope-

lessly, expecting to find more of the black marks that had already made her eyes swim. It was old, indeed, as was shown by its frayed creases and yellow tinge. But it was no transcript from the Rabbis. It was a real old letter, such as people used to seal with wax and fold with care: old enough to have lost the privilege of being sacred from all pairs of eyes but two, and to have gained that curious, indescribable fragrance that very old letters gain from time. Milly was guilty, therefore, of no indiscretion when, having read one line, she allowed herself to read more: and, as she read, the story suggested by these skeletons of dead lives drew her on.

.

"Bath, January 31st.

"My DEAR BOY,—You are this day of age, and a man, as well as a gentleman. That you have my hearty prayers and good wishes I need not assure you, for if you require assurance, I have indeed lived in

vain. I now and henceforth lay down my authority over you. You are your own master, and I am your best and oldest friend. I wish it had been possible to celebrate the auspicious day at home among our neighbours, that the heir of our house might have taken possession of man's estate with all due style and dignity. But *noblesse oblige*—we are both slaves, I to gout and you to duty, and they are masters who must be obeyed. Of course it is quite impossible that you should ask for furlough when disaffection, and possible invasion, fill the air: and my physician positively forbids me to move. So I have written to Norris to have an ox roasted in the park, and to take all proper measures to mark this day with a white stone.

“I have not yet considered the question of your future allowance, seeing that this depends for the present upon yet more important matter. It depends, in short, upon yourself to decide whether it shall

continue as at present, or whether it shall be increased very largely. I am about to make a suggestion that you will receive with pleasure. I do not say with obedience, for to that I have now resigned all claim: and I have no fear that you, who are a young man of sense, will not find pleasure enough in doing whatever is right and wise, without reference to my desire or your own inclination. For once, however, my desire, your inclination, and the interest of us both, are most singularly in accord. You will not have to say with the poet, '*Video meliora proboque : deteriora sequor.*' I have long known your more than brotherly affection for a certain fair neighbour of ours, and her more than sisterly affection for you. We elders are not blind to such things, and in love, as at whist, it is lookers on who see most of the game. But do not be afraid. I have ever looked upon Charlotte—shall I say your Charlotte?—as my second daughter: as my first, I

may almost say, since your sister was so imprudent as to forfeit *her* increased allowance by her marriage with Mr. Deane in opposition to my desire. Happily, I shall not be disappointed in *you*. I was speaking to Sir George, who is here, only yesterday, and he, I need not say, will heartily, nay eagerly, welcome you as his son. It is impossible not to recognise the direction of an over-ruling Providence in making such a marriage possible. You are heir and heiress. You are nearly of an age, with a slight difference on the right side. You are both prudent and wise. She is beautiful, accomplished, wealthy—all that a Duke could wish to crown with strawberry leaves. Were I not your father, I should be tempted to become your rival. With such an augmentation to our house, who knows but that Charlotte may become the wife, if not of a Duke, yet of a peer of the realm? I shall await your answer: and between you and me, I shrewdly suspect

Sir George has his daughter's already. There is some talk of a dissolution. In that case I have agreed with Sir George that you shall enter the House as my successor. God bless you, Harry, ever prays your affectionate FATHER.

"Your last to hand was sadly mis-spelt. I do not insist upon such an accomplishment as absolutely necessary for a Parliamentary career, but I wish nevertheless you would make an effort to improve. *Verbum sapienti*—it is by trifles that women judge men, and Charlotte spells remarkably well. Your handwriting, too, is still too puerile: too bad to compensate for your orthographical faults and too good to conceal them. If you can't write better, write worse: cacography is like prodigality—a fault in itself, but keeping out of sight a hundred more."

.
"DEAREST POLLY, — Here's a pickle! Whatever is to be done now? I was just going to right to my father to say Ide

never have any girl but you alone, and now while the very pen is in my hand comes such a letter which I inclose. You see, dearest Polly, I cant speak out at once, for my father would cut me off with a shilling, and that you see would not be pleasant to you, for you wouldn't bear to see me do without the things Ive been used to. He may talk very fine about me being my own Master and all that, but he's Master that holds the purse, let him talk never so fine. 'Twas the same with my sister who he let to do what she liked so long as what she liked were what he liked too, and so it will be with me. All the same, dearest Polly, Ime not going to do without you, for about there ever being anything betwix me and the girl he talks of, that's moon-shine. She may care for me but I don't care for her, so she may brake her heart and welcome, for I never cared for any but you, dearest Polly, since I was born, on my honner as an officer

and a gentleman. It's the money my father is after, which is a thing I despise, and about going into Parliament and making speeches, I wont. I can spel well enough when I like, with a good pen and a dictionerry, and that's more than lots of fellows can say. Ide like to see how a Bishop would spel if he was took away from his boox and put down in the Curragh, where Ime writing now. The Irish, dearest Polly, speak so different from what we do that of course the speling cant keep the same. So dearest Polly don't be jealous : only you see making a clean breast, as I meant to, ant on the cards. I shall just write him I cant as an officer and a gentleman, marry when the french may be down on us any day, and that will gain time, and time's the best horse to back going. That other girl might marry somebody else or die, and I hope she will. But if I cant marry, dearest Polly, as an officer and a gentleman, and if you'll come

over to me just the same, Ile marry you as soon as ever I get the chance, on the honner of an officer and a gentleman I will. You shall live like a lady all the rest of your days as happy as the day's long. Say yes and Ile get leave and run over and see you and take you away, for come you will I know if you don't want me to blow my brains out. You see how my father goes on about my spelling and things, but he owns I'm a man, and a man I'll be, as he'll see. You get ready and I'll come for you.—Your ever true and loving HARRY."

.

"DEER HARRY,—I got what you rot. Il marry you and not mind if you are cut but I will not come to you no other way and you did not ought to ax me.—Your trew loving POLLY."

.

“Bath, February 14th.

“MY DEAR SON,—I have duly received your letter informing me, to my surprise, that you think a delay in settling yourself advisable. I do not think so. I never intended, when you entered the army, that you should adopt it as a career, any more than when I sent you to school I intended to make you a finished scholar. When I spoke of your serving your country, I meant as Walpole served it, and not as Marlboro’. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*—sed *utilius vivere*: it is sweet to die for one’s country, but more profitable to live for her. That you have not become a finished scholar your spelling still shows: why you should consider yourself so inextricably pledged to Bellona I fail to perceive. The army is a good school, but a soldier is but a servant in livery after all. *Verbum sapienti*. A young lady like Miss Charlotte Craven is not likely to remain without offers while you are sowing your wild oats—which is

what I suppose you mean by serving your country. She may be, and is, ready to marry you, but may not be, and ought not to be, willing to wait your leisure. I now imperatively request your immediate compliance with my wish, or else a much better reason than you have yet given for disregarding it. I have the gout in one of my hands, or I would write more: but I have no doubt the attack will be past when I receive your reply, and will not prevent my signing any document that your conduct may render necessary. Sir George is anxious to know of your movements. I need not say that I have not submitted your last letter to his inspection. *Vive et Vale.*—Your affectionate FATHER."

.
"MY DEER, DEER HARRY,—I am quiet well, and happy. I only want them at home to know how happy I be. They must know soon. I always rite home once a month and they mite hear I am not at

my place no more. They will stare to hear what sort of a place I am in. I am so glad you have not hirt yourself marying me. I have some news for you. The peple here are very kind and I am quiet happy, only lonesome like. Come back soon, deer Harry, plese.—Your trew loving wife POLLY.”

.
“Quebec Street, London, December 24th.

“MISS MARY BROWN,—You will pardon my addressing you by the only name that I can acknowledge your right to bear. I have just had a conversation with my son, who has confessed to me that he has gone through the form of marriage with you. I say form advisedly. He was scoundrel enough—judge how keenly I feel when I apply such a word to one of my name—to have concealed from you the fact that, only two years since, he was most indisputably married to one whose name I need not mention here, and shall not without occasion.

She is living still, so that you, in the eye of the law, are no wife at all. One who knows so little of honour as to be ignorant of even how to spell it, is a husband whom any virtuous girl, as I trust you are, can afford to lose without a sigh. Nevertheless it is only fair that you should receive handsome compensation for the loss of even a scoundrel when that scoundrel, to my ineffable disgust, bears a name like ours. On condition that you keep silence concerning the misfortune that has befallen me, I will securely settle upon you one hundred pounds sterling per annum for the term of your natural life, and, on your marriage, will give you a dowry of one hundred pounds. You will, I trust, close at once with this offer, as I am not bound to make it, and as you will gain nothing by any attempt to make better terms beyond a possible loss of reputation.

“In all regret, I am yours truly,

“HORACE VANE.”

.

“Quebec Street, London, December 30th.

“MY DEAR POLLY,—Who would ever have thought you would cut up so devilish rough! This sort of things are done every day. Of course you know I am desprately sorry to give you up, but you see of course I must, as my father would think nothing of turning me out of doors, and I should have nothing but my pay, and I should have to exchange into some India regiment where there's yellow fever, which you would not like me to catch Im sure. It is quite true what he says, that when I was young and foolish I married another girl, but I never thought 'twas binding, nor meant it so to be. I did really and truly mean to marry you alone, as you ought to know, for nobody can say I didn't tell you that from the very first. However, there it is, and cant be helped now. You'd better take my father's offer. A hundred a year is much more than we would have betwix us if my wife was dead, and I wish she was, and you was living on

my pay: and perhaps if you was now to take up with some respectable young man in your own sphere that wouldn't ask too many questions, you'd do much better than you would with me. I'm quite broken hearted I do assure you on my honner, and desprate, and really very sorry. But you see 't is no good fretting, so if you wont neither will I. I hope you will always be happy, and I am yours affectionately HARRY.—Of course you will keep things dark and not say anything to anybody, as you would only do me harm, and you wouldn't do that for the world, I'm sure."

"SIR,—Miss Mary Brown's respects to Horace Vane Esquire and won't have a penny, but would starve first. I did not care for Mr. Harry for monny nor monny's worth. I don't want a name as is not mine, and if shame's to be bore, I'll bear it, and lay it on to nobody.

"Your honour'd servant,

"MARY BROWN."

“ My hart is broak Harry and its you thats broak it and thinking of the babe Im carying in my bosom O Harry Harry don’t you kno me better nor to want to pay me for what Ill do for love of you Isnt it enuf to kno Im your own wif as were marid in Church and no other woman can be more marid nor me Dont you be feard Ill touch your mony not if your own baby starves first and I tell Mr Vane the same You need not be feard you nor none will ever hear of me no more I said in Church Id honour and obey you and be a trew wif to you and what’s swore cant be unswore O Harry how coud you think Id do for mony what I woudn’t do for love I woudn’t have believed it if a Angel had told me If youd got to tire off me you’d ought to tell me and Id have drownd myself for Id never do a thing as would hurt you Harry I suppose that girl you marid were the ritch young lady you told me when you sayd you cared for none but me It was a shame to shame

me like youve done and I cant go hoam now
There's none would speke to me nor believe
me honest nor I wouldnt bring shame on
them there Only whats to come of me and
my baby if theres one to be God knows
and if He dont Id liefer trust Him nor you
now I supose youl go back to that other
girl now but you did care most for me Harry
for all youve turnd me off worse nor if you
hated me all along I wont shame you nor
I wont blame you sept for the child wich I
hope will never see light poor little thing
I dont care what comes of me no more Id
liefer dy than live for I can never think the
same of you but Ill always love you the same
and thats the worst of all Youve broak my
hart Harry but God bless you Harry Good
bye" . . .

Here the last letter, which, like the last
but one, had never passed through the post,
abruptly came to an end. But the corre-
spondence, fragmentary and incomplete as it

was, was easy enough for even Milly to follow in spite of the novelty of such a style of romance to her. It was not difficult to distribute the parts among the several actors. The letters from the father to the son were addressed to "Lieut. Vane, the Castle, Dublin, Ireland," and were marked in the corner "Frank : H. Vane." The letters from the son to his sweetheart were first addressed "Mary Brown, at the Vicarage, Winbury, near Eastington, England:" afterwards to "Mrs. Smith, at Mr. Tallis's shop, Norwich:" and the letter from the father to the girl was addressed to the same place, with the addition of the frank in the corner. A very slight acquaintance with the plots of novels enabled Milly to read that one of the Vanes of Winbury to whom the old Manor House had once belonged had the double misfortune to be possessed of a cold, worldly, and intriguing nature, and an exceptionally foolish son and heir, who balked his father's schemes by

falling in love with some low-born servant girl at the vicarage. Milly could not understand how any girl could have returned such love as his appeared from the beginning to be: doubtless she had been dazzled by good looks, gold lace, and flattery. Of course it was quite impossible that Milly could ever have mistaken the sham for the real, and so looked down at first with more scorn than sympathy upon the weakness of poor Polly Brown. Nevertheless the girl was respectable—that was clear. She had refused to go with her lover except as his wife, and had been taken by him secretly and under an assumed name to Norwich—and then Milly opened her eyes. Her aunt's husband had been an ironmonger at Norwich, and it was to his house that the girl appeared to have gone. This almost personal connection with the story doubled her interest as she gathered that the marriage had been discovered by the father, that the feeble-minded son had yielded to

threats of disinheritance, and that the pair of scoundrels had put forward some story, whether true or false she could not judge, to get rid of Polly Brown. The father's letter was bad enough, but Milly could not find thoughts to express her scorn and loathing for the letter of the young man who so lightly and shamelessly confessed himself the scoundrel that his father called him, and believed that as a matter of course any girl's heart could be bought off for any quantity of gold. She forgot to despise Polly for loving such a pitiful rascal, and her eyes filled with angry tears as she pictured the poor girl's despair when she wrote the letter that had never till now been seen by living eyes. What had been the end of it all? Death, of course, and a miserable death, but in what way? What had become of the cast-off wife and her unborn child? And by what strange means had all these bones of a dead love story come together among the pages of a Hebrew Bible?

There was then a real ghost in the old Manor House. No wonder she had felt least alone when most alone, that the wind had found an unearthly voice, and that she had been terrified without apparent cause! No wonder that she, a young girl, had felt herself in mystic and occult sympathy with the tragic tale of a young girl's love! She had opened the cupboard of the skeleton. Abel, in his search for hidden romance such as had never existed in the real world, had been feeling round and round about him, and had missed the only piece of living truth that was buried in all this learned lumber. It seemed as though a girl's touch had been needed to release the ghost from its tomb—a girl's touch, not warped by vain and idle dreams, but warm with the only human life that had, within living memory, found its way within the walls of the book-room. Abel had tried to be a ghost himself: Milly was trying to live, and had drawn this ghost back to its old world.

The correspondence, save for the incidental appearance of her aunt's married name, obviously concerned no soul now living. All the Vanes, as she knew, were dead and gone long ago, and a good thing too. The Hebrew volume had possibly been chosen on the same principle as that on which the boy Abel had chosen the back of its shelf as a hiding-place for his broken tea-cup—as the place of all others where it was least likely to be looked for. Milly did not restore the letters to their hiding-place. She carried them down to the housekeeper's room, and there read them over again, finding more interest in the perusal than she had ever drawn from the most exciting chapter of the most exciting novel in all Eastington. She thought over them, and tried to read between the pale grey lines and to restore the long blanks from her own fancy. Having unearthed the true ghost, she was haunted by imaginary fears no more. At last, when it was

nearly midnight, she placed the tired ghost under her warm pillow and lay down to dream.

The morning broke gloriously—all yesterday felt like a dream.

Not a curl of mist was left upon the dewy grass of the park, not the faintest scud hid the sun. It was a true October morning, bright, bracing, and clear. The ghosts had swept away, with the tinker at the head of them. Milly felt for the letters while she woke—they were there, safe and warm. She passed through the book-room on her way downstairs, and laughed at the fears and anxieties of the night before. Though the mystery of Abel was still unsolved, she had never felt so strong and well. She sang as she laid breakfast ready for her aunt's return, and then strolled out into the open air. Early morning is easy to kill.

She was leaning over the little garden-

gate and warming her shoulders in the sun when she became aware of a tall young man striding along firmly between the beech-trees, with his head erect and his chest opened to catch every breath of the fresh air. She caught herself colouring a little, for she knew it to be her hero of yesterday: and what could he be doing here? At any rate he was trespassing.

The young man just moved his hat as he approached the gate. "Good morning," he said politely. She had slightly the advantage over him in having seen him approach, while he had been looking round too widely to notice her: and they were at an age when the most trivial advantages tell.

"Good morning," answered Milly, as he waited for something more to say. "If you want to see my aunt—Mrs. Tallis, that is—she is gone to Eastington: but I'm expecting her back every hour."

"Well," he said, with a smile, "I did want to see Mrs. Tallis, and I didn't at the

same time." After the first recognition was over, she felt, without observing it, that there was a slight shade of difference in his tone towards her—it was not less courteous than yesterday, but certainly a little more condescending. "The fact is, Miss Barnes, I have been hearing such a lot from my old uncle about the Manor House that I have been seized with a desire to explore it—I am a tiger after queer old places, you know. So, as there was nothing else to do, I came to ask Mrs. Tallis if she would kindly let me look over it—that's all."

Tom's passion for archæology was certainly of sudden growth, but that of course Milly could not know. It might be common with young men beyond the narrow bounds of Winbury and Eastington.

"What a pity," she said, "my aunt isn't at home—she would have been so glad, when she knew how good you have been to me. I am so sorry! But you can come again?"

"Well, yes, I could come again, of course—only you see I've got to be back in Cambridge, and I mightn't have another chance. If you knew all about halls and gates and chapels, you'd understand," said Tom, with a freshman's pride in details still upon him.

"In Cambridge? Do you live there?" exclaimed Milly quickly. "Do you know a place called St. Christopher?"

"Know St. Kit's? I should think I did—rather! It's my own college, that's all. Do you know anybody at St. Kit's—that's what we call St. Christopher's? By Jove, we may turn out better acquaintances than we suppose."

Certainly it was odd, on the face of it, to meet a housekeeper's niece in a corner like Winbury inquiring after a college like St. Christopher's. Had it been after St. Anthony's, that would have been a different thing. But then there is no knowing who men are when they are at home: and, after all, Miss Barnes's connection with St. Chris-

topher's might be through the kitchen or buttery.

"Do you know a— young man named Herrick?" asked Milly, with a deep flush that anybody but another young man must have seen.

"Herrick! By Jove, I should think so, and a clever fellow he is too. We've made up our minds he's to be Lord Chancellor. Fancy meeting a friend of Herrick's down here! Why not, though? He must come from somewhere. Is he a relation of yours?"

"No," said Milly, rather shortly, and with a sudden feeling of shame, as if for something indelicate, at having had to ask after her betrothed husband from an utter stranger. She was longing to ask all manner of questions, but only said carelessly, "He is from this place—that's all."

"Of course she couldn't be one of his people though," thought Tom, "or she wouldn't have coupled him with St. Kit's."

—I dare say I shall see him before long: shall I tell him I've seen you?"

"No, please—no, thank you," she said, feeling more confused than she appeared. "I can show you the inside of the house myself, as my aunt is away," she added, forgetful of her aunt's injunction to let nobody in but Mr. Smith, and only wishing to change the subject and to get a chance of hearing news of Abel without asking for it. "I don't know much about what there is to see, if there's anything"——

"Thank you, Miss Barnes—if I am not keeping you from anything better—I don't want to make other people idle just because I am."

"Not at all—and if you were, I ought to put by everything, after yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"When you saved me"——

"I wish you wouldn't remember such a trifle. I wish I had done something better than just telling a man to go about his

business—I told him, and he went, that's all, and so he would have gone for anybody who happened to be passing. But, if you really don't mind, I will come in for just ten minutes—no more."

It is not often that one is led through a show-place by so silent a guide. Whatever the history of the Manor House may have been, Milly knew nothing of it save what she had learned from the Hebrew Bible. She was herself the only object of the smallest interest that the house contained. Nevertheless Tom seemed interested, and certainly put no questions that she was unable to answer. He looked into the empty rooms, and saw nothing in them: he passed by the books and did not even look at them. Milly's good opinion of him was confirmed: she thought him an exceedingly pleasant young man — not so clever as Abel, of course, for that was impossible for anybody to be, but nevertheless much easier to get on with and talk to. One can't expect everybody to be everything.

Nothing more was said of her mysterious lover. She was too anxious to hear of him, he too indifferent to speak of him, to bring him forward either directly or indirectly. He heard a little of Eastington and Miss Baxter's; she, something of Cambridge and Horchester. But the time passed quickly by, and both were beginning to be old friends, when the sound of wheels was heard.

"This used to be the drawing-room," Milly was beginning, when "There is my aunt!" she exclaimed almost in dismay, suddenly remembering that Mr. Eliot was not Mr. Smith and that she had broken rules. "I must go down and meet her."

Tom, who had no wish to hide, followed her, and met Mrs. Tallis, who had just stepped down from the cart of the Eastington carrier. The old lady stared at seeing a stranger.

"Mrs. Tallis?" asked Tom politely: "I am the Vicar's nephew: and I called to—to—I called to"—

"Mr. Eliot wanted to see the house, aunt," explained Milly, supplying his lapse of memory. "So, as you were away"—

"To see the house? Mr. Eliot?" asked Mrs. Tallis, stiffly, and anything but graciously. "You are Mr. Markham's nephew, sir?"

"Does she suppose I came to eat it?" thought Tom, as he looked with curiosity at her tall, stiff figure and her long blue cloak, over which her hard eyes still stared at him suspiciously. "Yes," he said, with double politeness, "my uncle told me so much about the house that I wanted to see it for myself—I expected to find an old barn, tumbling about my ears, but I only wish the vicarage could hold a candle to it. Why, it's kept like a palace."

Mrs. Tallis smiled grimly. "I try to do my duty," she said, "as well as I can with one pair of hands. If the Vicar was to come and inspect for himself, he'd understand that one pair means well done, two pair half done, and

his three pair not done at all. Servants are idle hussies, Mr. Eliot, even the best, and there's too many cooks at the Vicar's—that's the fault there."

"I quite agree with you, ma'am," said Tom gravely, seeing how the land lay. "But, by Jove, talking of cooks, it's my uncle's luncheon time. Never mind—when I come to Winbury again, will you show me the house yourself? I can see it is a place to learn in, and I am a tiger after well-kept places, you must know."

"Milly," said her aunt as soon as Tom was out of sight down the avenue, "I don't mind this Mr. Eliot, who seems a decent and sensible young man, and is Mr. Markham's nephew, though I never heard of his having one before. But if I can't feel sure the house is free from intrusion I shan't ever be able to be gone for a day. I hope you chained the door?"

"Yes, aunt."

"And raked out the fire?"

"Yes."

"And—gracious on us, what has happened here?" she exclaimed, looking round in dismay.

"It was the cat, aunt—I just went out and she pulled over—oh, dear, if I haven't left her locked up in the cupboard all this while!"

"In the cupboard! Good gracious, where I laid out all yesterday's eggs out of harm's way! It's a judgment on me," she almost groaned. "Never, never while I live will I leave the house for five minutes again. What else have you done, Milly? Let me hear the worst of it. I declare there's nobody alive can look after a cat but me. And whatever litter's here?" she exclaimed, as her eyes fell upon the yellow letters that lay on the table.

"They fell out of a book," said the wretched Milly, as she let the imprisoned cat out of her cell, and wiped the yolk of three eggs from her paws. "I put them

there for you to see. Oh, aunt, it was such a miserable day, and I hope you never *will* leave home again. If it hadn't been for Mr. Eliot, you might have found me"——

"Out of a book? My spectacles, Milly—let me see them—whatever has come to my eyes"——

"Yes, aunt—you might have come home and found me in"——

"The only place I never dusted in!"

"What are they? What is it?" asked Milly, finding that her story was falling upon heedless ears. But Mrs. Tallis did not speak till she had slowly read through the letters word by word.

"I wonder," she said at last while carefully refolding them, "if the gig is out from the Vane Arms."

"Aunt—what is it? What are you goin to do? Is it anything about the letters?"——

"It's nothing about the letters. I've remembered I've forgot half my business, that's all. I must go back to Eastington. I

suppose I shall find the house burnt down behind my back when I return, but if it burns, it must burn now."

With this reckless speech on her lips she marched down the avenue towards the Vane Arms, leaving Milly and mystery to wear out another long day between them. By the time the sun went down, Milly discovered that she had spent a whole four-and-twenty hours without once thinking of Abel.

END OF VOL. I.



1

6



